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**A.S. BYATT'S POSSESSION, THE DJINN IN
THE NIGHTINGALE'S EYE, THE CHILDREN'S
BOOK: THE WOMAN READER/WRITER'S
REVISING FEMALE IDENTITY**

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ÖZ

A.S. BYATT'S *POSSESSION*, *THE DJINN IN THE NIGHTINGALE'S EYE*, *THE CHILDREN'S BOOK*: THE WOMAN READER/WRITER'S REVISING FEMALE IDENTITY

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Bu çalışma, İngiliz yazar A.S. Byatt'ın üç eserinde kadın kimliğinin inşası ve tanımlanmasında okuma ve yazma eylemlerinin rolünü incelemektedir. Metinlerarasılığın, seçilen üç eserde masallar, kısa hikayeler, şiirler ve mitler üzerinden incelendiği tezde edebiyatta kadın geleneğinin önemi de vurgulanmaktadır. Seçilen yapıtlarda A.S. Byatt'ın kadın karakterleri gerek erkek egemen toplum yapısının değerlerini içerisinde barındıran gerekse bu dayatmacı değerlere karşı çıkan kadın geleneğinin metinlerini okuyan kişiler olarak resmedilmiştir. Kadın karakterlerin bahsedilen bu okuma eylemleri bir yeniden yazım sürecine dönüşmekte ve bu süreçte kadın kimliği yeniden tanımlanabilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Metinlerarasılık, yazar kimliği, cinsiyet, edebi gelenek.

ABSTRACT

A.S. BYATT'S *POSSESSION*, *THE DJINN IN THE NIGHTINGALE'S EYE*, *THE CHILDREN'S BOOK*: THE WOMAN READER/WRITER'S REVISING FEMALE IDENTITY

YASEMİN YILMAZ YÜKSEK

This study investigates the role of reading and writing in the formation and definition of female identity in A.S. Byatt's three works. The study which also investigates intertextuality through fairy tales, short stories, poems, and myths emphasizes the importance of female tradition in literature. In the three works analyzed in this study, the female protagonists are portrayed as readers of not only texts embodying the values of a patriarchal culture but also texts that resist these values. The reading practices of the protagonists turn into a re-writing process during which woman identity is redefined.

Keywords: Intertextuality, writer identity, gender, literary tradition.

PREFACE

This study investigates the role reading and writing play in the formation of female identity, with a specific focus on cultural codes and values imposed by patriarchal culture. The works analyzed present women both in the restricting world of the Victorian period and the changing world of the 20th century. Victorian culture defined women as the one responsible for the order in the house, the macrocosm of a proper society, restricting her individuality. The twentieth century witnessed the spread of political movements, Women's Suffrage Movement being among the noteworthy ones. The transition from restricting women into the domestic realm to acknowledging her identity as an individual points at the change in the prevalent gender codes.

The novels revisit old texts with an aim to highlight the need of the woman/writer for a female literary tradition while revealing the extent her identity has been shaped within a patriarchal culture. Just as a woman's approach to a text is determined by the gender codes imposed, her writing act is guided by a prevalent sense of "anxiety", as characterised by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

The novels also reveal one's dependence on narratives to make sense of his/her existence since texts - as timeless narratives - are the door to an imaginative journey and a meaningful quest for identity. The process of making meanings is accompanied by narratives retold and rewritten over time.

In the introduction, I have attempted to establish a theoretical framework for my analysis of the three novels with respect to the formation of female identity and a contextual framework to show what and how the female protagonists read and how their reading act guides their writing. Then, in Chapter I, II and III, I have analyzed how Byatt, as a woman writer, has portrayed her protagonists as ardent readers of a long female tradition as well as writers or narrators of their own narratives. In all these three chapters, I have looked at the challenges of encountering an androcentric literature and the woman reader's attempts to overcome them through a new encounter with a female voice. Writing is underlined, then, as the expected outcome of this encounter with a voice similar to her own and thus as an act of self-expression.

Prof. Dr. Esra Melikođlu guided my study and helped me a great deal in this difficult and tiring process. At those times of disappointment and despair, she encouraged me to keep on with my study and write this thesis. She accepted me to her house many times and spent her valuable time for me to complete everything on time. I would like to express my special gratitude to her for her continuous support, patience, and motivation. I also owe her many thanks for her PhD course on intertextuality, which helped me develop my ideas in this thesis. Besides my advisor, I would like to thank the rest of my thesis committee: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Murat Seękin and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Işıl Hitit for their encouragement and important suggestions. My sincere thanks also goes to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yıldız Kılıç and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Canan Şavkay for their insightful PhD courses and guidance. I would also like to thank my family: my parents, my aunt, and to my husband for supporting and believing me. Last but not the least, I thank my sister, Çiğdem, who gave all her love and unfailing support throughout my years of study and through the process of writing this thesis. I dedicate this thesis to her.

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Yasemin Yılmaz Yüksek

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ibid: Ibidem (Aynı eser/yer)

op.cit: Opere citato (Adı geçen eser)

Ed. by: Edited by (Editör/yayına hazırlayan)

p./pp.: page/pages (sayfa/sayfalar)

INTRODUCTION

Examining the acts of reading, rewriting, and storytelling in the fiction of A.S. Byatt, the present dissertation aims to show their role in the attempt of four of her female characters to define their identity as a woman/writer. It will be argued that the female protagonists of Byatt's novel *Possession*¹, Maud Bailey and Christabel LaMotte, the female protagonist of her novelette *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*², Gillian Perholt, and other *Children's Book*³, Olive Wellwood, appear as both ardent readers⁴ and writers. Their practices as such determine the way they define their identity as women in both a patriarchal society and in a literary tradition which is dominated by men, but also reveal their literary ancestress. Gillian revisits old myths and fairy tales presenting different female characters, underprivileged and/or empowered, only to finally write her own story as a woman/narratologist. The Victorian poet LaMotte emerges as both Maud's biological and literary ancestress, while Olive finds her female heritage in the gothic, which was predominantly written by and for women. Gillian, Maud, and Olive, then, restore their links with their literary mothers and/or reread and rewrite their female characters' stories. This act of revision helps them reconsider the place of women in the past as well as their own places in their contemporary society and literature.

Nancy A. Walker, in her book called *The Disobedient Writer*⁵, states that "Narratives are essential to our sense of place in a human continuum, and one of the strategies that women have employed to mark out their own places is to challenge the authority of existing narratives by telling them anew out of their own necessities". In her article called "Wonder Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in *The Djinn in the*

¹A.S. Byatt, *Possession*, London, Vintage Books, 2009.

²A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995.

³A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010.

⁴ Maud reads LaMotte's letters, diaries, and poems as well as the latter's rewriting of "The Glass Coffin" and "Cumaeen Sibyl"; Gillian reads myths and fairy tales such as *One Thousand and One Nights* in addition to her reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Olive reads *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Peter Pan*, *The Mother Goose* stories.

⁵Nancy A. Walker, *The Disobedient Writer: Woman and Narrative Tradition*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995, p.11.

Nightingale's Eye", Annegret Maack, accentuating Byatt's use of metafiction, or rewriting, similarly observes that we "understand our life not by attempting to record it realistically but through the mirror of imaginative tales."⁶ Byatt herself emphasizes the writer's indebtedness to prior texts in *Passions of the Mind*: "We all make meanings by using the myths and fictions of our ancestors as a way of making sense, or excitement, out of our experience on the earth."⁷ Byatt's female protagonists will be analyzed in line with this premise; it will be shown that they are guided in their quests to define themselves as women/writers by narratives of the past written by their literary mothers and/or fathers. They engage with fairytales, stories, and poems (as well as letters and diaries) to extract from them their self-making narratives. Clearly, reading and rewriting is, for them, always an active state of not only learning about the challenges in women's lives but also of questioning their own lives with respect to these challenges and elaborating ways to struggle with them.

A secluded, unmarried Victorian poet, LaMotte reads and rewrites, among others, mythical stories, largely anonymous, featuring powerful and supposedly dangerous women. Maud, a young late 20th century academician running a Women's Resource Centre at Lincoln University, studies LaMotte's texts, in which she reads her own life as a female, her anxieties and desires. Gillian is another eager (and resistant) reader of old fables and tales, anonymous or by men, which, however, present female characters whose lives reflect her own as a middle-aged woman/narratologist in a post-modern world. The relatively young Olive, a poor miner's daughter who became the wife of a well-off, adulterous man and mother of seven, writes gothic children's tales in an older period beginning in the 1890s and leading up to World War I. She thus also witnesses the emergence of the Fabian Society and Suffrage Movement, to which she does, however, not fully commit herself. The latter movement, in particular, had a deep impact on women's roles in both society and the world of literature, and indeed appeared to promise them ultimate emancipation and self-fulfillment, but Olive is still imprisoned in the roles

⁶Annegret Maack. "Wonder-Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in The Djinn in the *Nightingale's Eye*", *Essays on The Fiction of A.S. Byatt, Imagining the Real*, Ed. by. Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble. London: Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 131.

⁷A.S. Byatt, *Passions of the Mind*, New York: Random House, 1991, p. 312.

of wife and mother. The young Maud finds herself in more or less today's world in which women are still struggling to reconcile their love life with their academic or literary writing. Most of these female readers/writers are, then, not contemporaries and hence confronted with clashing and merging notions of womanhood, which they seek to review and revise. The acts of rereading and rewriting older texts, then, help Byatt's female protagonists to review real and fictitious women's lives and literary productions with the object of understanding their own roles as women/writers.

We observe a close relationship between reading and (re)writing in Maud, LaMotte, Gillian, and Olive's lives. Nancy A. Walker argues that a woman writer is after all a good reader of a whole literary history: "[I]mplicit in a discussion of women's imaginative encounters with a literary tradition of which they are not an obvious part is a consideration of women as readers of this tradition, for prior to resisting the authority of the assumptions of narrative necessities of a text must come an understanding of its putative power."⁸The woman writer is a conscientious reader recording her experiences of reading, in the novels of discussion, in particular, of women's texts, as ample source for her writing. The woman reader who has come to a full awareness of her active role in reading now enjoys the freedom to write/narrate/tell stories of her own.

Yet it is not only in their role as writers, but also as readers that Maud, LaMotte, Gillian, and Olive encounter obstacles and engage in a struggle against them. Immanuel Kant conceived of the reader as a male who, reigning in 'feminine' emotions, used his reason to make sense of texts. Again, Kate Flint argues that according to 19th century society, "From one point of view, reading was a form of consumption associated with the possession of leisure time, and thus contributed to the ideology [...] which supported the ideal of the middle-class home. Yet it could also be regarded as dangerously useless, a thief of time which might be spent on housewifely duties."⁹The reading woman could thus be dangerous to the patriarchal

⁸Nancy A. Walker, **The Disobedient Writer. Women and Narrative Tradition**. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995, p. 3.

⁹Kate Flint. **The Woman Reader**. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 11.

system and had to be redirected to her domestic duties. But in recent years, the question 'how does a woman read', which cannot be thought separately from the more frequently asked question 'how does a woman write', has been raised. Both largely unanswered- questions primarily imply the assumption that a woman is different from a man both as a reader and a writer as well as suggest the importance of examining this difference. Giving a list of feminist thinkers who try to give an answer to these questions, Jonathan Culler draws attention to the risks that women readers encounter when reading texts. For Culler, "reading as a woman is not necessarily what occurs when a woman reads: women can read, and have read, as men"¹⁰. Again, Patrocinio Schweickart speaks of "Androcentric literature [which] is all the more efficient as an instrument of sexual politics because it does not allow the woman reader to seek refuge in her difference."¹¹ What Schweickart sees as the risk of reading androcentric literature is the difficulty women in a patriarchal culture experience in the attempt to confront the other in the text, which is basically their repressed self.

Patrocinio Schweickart summarizes the reading process in three stages. First, the woman reader is "immasculated" by the text and the second stage points at her awareness of this state. The final phase is her acquiring the awareness that as a reader her role in the reading process is no less crucial than the role of the text. For Schweickart, the final phase also refers to what feminism tries to introduce as a new perspective into reader-response criticism. A woman reader who discovers the power dynamics operating in the male text struggles against it and turns to female texts. Schweickart argues that "feminist readings of women's writing open up space for another, equally important, critical project, namely, the articulation of a model of reading that is centered on a female paradigm."¹².

¹⁰Jonathan Culler, **On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism**. New York: Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 49.

¹¹Patrocinio P. Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading", **Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts**. Ed. by. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart. London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 42.

¹²Ibid, p. 52.

In a similar spirit, Culler raises the following question: “what difference does it make if the reader is a woman?”¹³ As Culler points out, the attempt to answer this question necessitates that we approach the art of reading from a feminist perspective. The relation between gender and reading entails to focus on the reader as a gendered concept. It is, as noted above, generally assumed that the responses of a woman reader to a text written by either a male or a female author will necessarily be different from those of a man reading the same text. The woman reader is expected to read with a tendency to sympathize with the female character and identify with her otherness and thus discover her own, while a male reader will not even see the female character as having any significance or even as the protagonist. Culler notes that “Women’s experience, many feminist critics claim, will lead them to value” or we might say, read “works differently from their male counterparts, who may regard the problems women characteristically encounter as of limited interest”.¹⁴ Reading as a woman is, then, an ‘unsettling’ practice since woman readers have to break out of the male presumptions. Maud, LaMotte, Gillian, and Olive must find a way to implicate their gender difference in the acts of reading and writing.

Having read a number of androcentric texts and become aware of the resulting immasculation, the woman reader now reads to find a voice similar to her own, a feminine voice. For the woman reader, reading a feminine text is a confrontation with a new self, an ‘other’ different from the one she encounters as the reader of male texts. During the reading and, we might add, writing process, Byatt’s female characters under discussion seek to go beyond patriarchal confines and discover the “other” that turns into a woman writer and tries to construct a sense of her identity as an emancipated being.

As Elizabeth A. Flynn aptly remarks about gendered codes of reading, “reading involves a confrontation between self and ‘other’. For Flynn, the “self” is the reader whereas the “other” is the text. Thus it appears that “[t]ext and reader are

¹³Jonathan Culler, **On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism**. New York: Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 42.

¹⁴Ibid, p.45.

necessarily foreign to each other in some ways".¹⁵ Flynn argues that the text disturbs the reader, forcing her to make a critical reading of her own life. For Patrocinio Schweickart in the act of reading it is also the reader's repressed self that erupts as the other. In the present analysis it will be argued that the other is indeed not only the text but also the reader's hidden self that emerges during reading and subsequently writing. As they read a range of texts, Byatt's reader/writer characters also read about their own life as well, thus being faced, in the act, with their other self. What they see as the other is the self that allows them to read as woman. In the case of the three protagonists, the other takes the shape of the Sibyl in the Cave; the djinn; and a Mother Goose who is frustrated with her domestic role and desirous of free artistic production, respectively. It causes the female readers to question their past and present lives and take stock of the problem they encounter in their attempt to reconcile their roles as lover, wife and/or mother with their desire to be a free woman/writer. When they start to question their opinions and beliefs in line with what they read, they feel a lack and reading ceases to be pleasing. However, ultimately, in this act of self-questioning the readers acquire a greater awareness of their gender identity and frustrated desires as well as a greater awareness of the social codes that seek to hamper them.

The woman reader's interaction with the text takes place in the form of a critical assessment of the experiences of both the character she is presented with and her own, during which the rewriting of the text starts. Once a critical evaluation of the self starts, the text confronts the reader with the 'other' self in the text as well as makes her feel the necessity to free her emotions and redefine herself. The reader/writer is in a sense renewed at the end of a critical, unsettling, and at the same time emotional interaction with the text and seeks to give expression to this new self and consciousness. As an outcome of this reevaluation, the practice of reading is followed by writing as well. Any kind of writing – be it metaphorical or literal – originates from many (re)readings and every writer is, or should be, at the same time

¹⁵Elizabeth A. Flynn "Gender and Reading", **Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Context**, Ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart, London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 267.

a good reader. As a productive act, reading constitutes ample source for writing, which functions as a way for the female reader to 'speak' for herself.

In "Gender Interests in Reading and Language", David Bleich refers to the close affinity between reading and the urge to write. It can be said, he suggests, that the confrontation of the woman reader with the other in the text (which is nobody but herself) is followed by a new phase in which reading now enables the woman reader to reabsorb her hidden other and thus eliminates her otherness to herself. The text ceases to be a foreign ground as the new awareness the reader has acquired makes her speak on behalf of herself. "The women 'become' the tellers of the tales that they are reading" as it is now the case that "[n]either the teller nor the tale is radically other for the women¹⁶".

Through writing, the woman reader, then, fulfills a need to convey what she has acquired as a result of her reading practice. It is the ground for the newly formulated self to express herself. For the woman reader, writing is a generative phase providing her the chance to write for nobody but herself about her fears, anxieties, and desires. Again, it helps them subvert what Adrienne Rich sees as a male-governed literature in which the female writer (and reader) "comes up against something that negates every- thing she is about: she meets the image of Woman in books written by men."¹⁷ Traditionally, woman is either the angel in the house or a monster.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, moreover, point at the problematic nature of the relation between women and language as well as Harold Bloom's explanation of the anxiety of authorship (rather than the anxiety of influence) and suggest the idea that the act of writing, for women, would serve to ease the tension and lets the woman voice heard, yet the precursors of women writers were also male hinder their writing and leads to a fear of not being able to create:

"Certainly if we acquiesce in the patriarchal Bloomian model, we can be sure that the female poet does not experience the "anxiety of influence" in the same way that

¹⁶David Bleich, *op. cit*, p. 265.

¹⁷Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", *Women, Writing and Teaching*, p. 21.

her male counterpart would, for the simple reason that she must confront precursors who are almost exclusively male, and therefore significantly different from her. Not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority (as our discussion of the metaphor of literary paternity argued), they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of self - that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity.¹⁸

Gilbert and Gubar also argue that “language itself was almost literally alien to the female tongue” and for many writers “[i]n the mouths of women, vocabulary loses meaning, sentences dissolve, literary messages are distorted or destroyed”¹⁹. Yet Maud, LaMotte, Gillian, and Olive’s reading does lead to the act of writing/story-telling since their reading act help them to come to a consciousness of their literary tradition.

Nancy Walker’s preference to define the woman writer as “disobedient” points at the dissident nature of writing, which requires a critical stance. Just as the act of reading is realized with the active participation of the woman reader and provides her with the chance of confrontation her hidden, disobedient self, writing is the subsequent phase during which the woman reader fully realizes herself. Reading enables her to comparatively analyze male and female texts, to realize the presence of the prototypes and subsequently to question them. Writing, in this respect, is another phase in the woman reader’s journey into the text. Having encountered the biased portrayal of female characters in the male texts, the woman reader now adopts a feminist reading strategy and, in this way, reformulates the text in her mind. Thus, reading is necessarily followed by a rewriting of the text. In an age in which one’s sense of a single reality or Truth is deconstructed, writing through intertextual links, or rewriting, enables the reader/writer to attempt to construct new realities and identities. However, Byatt’s female readers/writers are aware of men’s historical

¹⁸ Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, “Infection in the Sentence”, **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p.48.

¹⁹ Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, “The Queen’s Looking Glass”, **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p.31.

dominance in the field of literature and hence susceptible to the anxiety of authorship and in search of reaffirming female literary ancestors.

The question, then, how does a woman read is closely related to the question how does a woman write. That reading necessitates an active participation by the reader comes to mean that the female reader reads with an awareness of the traps in male texts just as she realizes the social and cultural codes inscribed into the text. The fact that with each new reading, the text is rewritten implies that these codes are questioned to be either accepted or rejected, thus the process of rewriting already starts with the reading act. In the case of the woman writer, whose access to texts was once considered threatening, her writing is nourished with all the material acquired through reading and stored and encoded in her mind. Maud, LaMotte, Gillian and Olive draw on this material in order to review and attempt to revise women's traditional role in patriarchal society. Yet even the almost contemporary Gillian and the young Maud must realize that the women's movement has and has not arrived.

CHAPTER I

POSSESSION: READING AND WRITING WITHIN A FEMALE TRADITION

1.1. Christabel LaMotte as the Literary Ancestor of Maud Bailey

Intertextual *Possession* presents two main female protagonists, who are readers/writers: Christabel LaMotte and Maud Bailey. One is a Victorian poet, who is the biological mother of Maia and both the biological ancestor and literary mother of Maud Bailey. Maud, a reader of Breton mythology, (auto) biographies, poems, and letters of LaMotte as well as an academician writing on LaMotte's poetry, is portrayed as a woman reader/writer like her ancestor. Both Byatt and Maud read with a similar kind of zeal to know more about the literature preceding them as it enables them to place themselves as women/writers in society and in the literary world. Byatt dwells on the issue of reading and writing as both a most welcome and an unsettling experience as it forces the (female) reader to enter a process of self-questioning¹. One natural outcome of this process is that Maud and LaMotte acquire the chance to realize both her discontent with patriarchal society and desire to fully embrace her identity as a woman/writer.

Byatt draws her readers' attention to the presence of a submerged female literary tradition by creating a female reader character, Maud, engaged in reading the works of her ancestress, the Victorian woman writer LaMotte. Maud is at the centre of the narration that takes place in the 20th century, taking a critical view of herself as an academician and a woman as she reads the works and life of another woman/writer. The fact that she constructs her own life story with what she gets out

¹Maud, for instance, reads "The Glass Coffin", written by her ancestor Christabel LaMotte. Just as LaMotte rewrites the tale to ascertain her identity, Maud chooses to read and internalize it first to find a link to the literary tradition then to feel part of it and get a sense of female identity.

of the texts she reads displays the intertextual connections within the narration. Maud is one of two women researchers involved in studies on LaMotte. Working in a Women's Research Center in Lincoln, she has access to LaMotte's unpublished papers, which are also the objects of the interest of the male protagonist of the novel, Roland, a researcher on the life and works of Henry Ash, the lover of LaMotte. Roland's first confrontation with Maud in her office reveals Maud's attitude to life and her view of being a woman. On one of the posters on the wall of her office in the Women's Studies block is written "a woman has a right to decide about her own body"², which makes Roland feel uncomfortable. There is also a poster announcing "a Feminist Revue", which says: "Come and see the Sorcieres, the Vamps, the daughters of Kali and the Fatae Moraganae. We'll make your blood run cold and make you laugh on the sinister side of your face at Women's Wit and wickedness."³ Maud's attitude toward Roland is, moreover, rather frosty. Later, when invited to her home, he, likening himself to Ash, feels like an intruder, among the books she reads for her study on LaMotte: "He was an intruder into their female fastnesses. Like Randolph Henry Ash."⁴ Despite these assertions of women's power, and 'wickedness', or rather revolt, and sisterly solidarity, Maud has failed to fully emancipate herself from men and patriarchal codes.

Tracing her family background, Maud engages in an extensive reading act and comes across a number of questions regarding her motives as a researcher as well as her worries and expectations as a woman. Initially a curious and introspective reader and later a productive writer, she is in a constant search of her origins and feels an intensive need to define her identity as a woman by retrieving her literary mother, LaMotte. She collects all the letters, poems, and tales written by LaMotte and makes an extensive reading of them with a pressing need to feel part of the female past and present. LaMotte's lover Ash, on the other hand, does not need to be rediscovered as he is a well-established literary figure. In this respect, *Possession* as

²A.S. Byatt, **Possession**, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 48.

³Ibid., p. 48.

⁴Ibid., p. 58.

the frame text "is the study of a woman's unwitting search for her origins"⁵, her female origin.

Byatt and Maud's interest in mythology, fairy tales, and the literature preceding them implies that this quest is not only about the origins of humanity in general but at the same time an expression of their curiosity about the origins women and their creative productions. Colon notes that "woven throughout the text; however, in the fictional documents, both contemporary and Victorian, that fill it, is a pervasive attention to the myths - or truths - of the origins of humanity, of myth, and of poetry"⁶ as well as a woman's search for her own origins⁷. In *Possession*, Byatt shows an inclination to incorporate different genres of several periods into the narration. And Maud, with her zeal to read letters, diary extracts, and poems by LaMotte and her interest in writing and storytelling, is not different from the author of the novel. As the frame text, *Possession* incorporates different kinds of texts - letters, poems, diaries, short writings of correspondence, and journals - that Maud as a reader consumes in order to construct her own identity and narrative.

Interest in and commentary about women writers, as also professed by Maud, a feminist academician, have contributed to the emergence of a new feminist consciousness of the fact that texts by women writers reveal much about the reality of being a woman in literature and real life. Adrienne Rich's statement in her article "When We Dead Awaken" underlines this function of literature by women to raise questions about the place of women in literature and society: "A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see-and

⁵Susan E. Colon, "The Possession of Paradise: A.S.Byatt's Reinscription of Milton", **Christianity and Literature**, 2003, p. 77.

⁶Ibid, p. 77.

⁷As the author of the novel, Byatt is most similar to Maud in her attempts to have an ontological understanding of existence. In many of her interviews and writings on her novels, she expresses her indebtedness to myths and old tales, which are rewritten in her novels. She acknowledges that the novel in the 19th and 20th centuries used myths and tales to a great extent.

therefore live-afresh."⁸ The text becomes a field of free expression for the woman writer and provides her with the chance to be in connection with readers, both male and female. Through her encounter with texts written by LaMotte, Maud feels in touch with the female literary tradition, which awakens in her a potential for dissent, or emancipating herself further from patriarchal norms imposed on women. The past is to be read and known not in order to conform to it completely but for the sake of reading the present in the light of a reevaluated past that must then be rewritten in the shape of a liberating narrative. *Possession*, then, welcomes readings and rewritings of a number of texts as a tool, particularly for the female protagonist, to make sense of her present role in society and the literary world.

Maud spends most of her time reading the letters of LaMotte. She deems them more important than academic documents or historical texts. For the woman writer, personal texts written by her ancestress say more about the female tradition and women's lives than texts written on them and the characteristics of the period. Women must tell their own stories, which, albeit fictional, might contain more truthfulness than supposedly objective biographies and the like. Maack argues that "we understand our life not by attempting to record it realistically but through the mirror of imaginative tales"⁹.

The point to be questioned is the reason for the pressing need to establish a link with the past. Why does Maud feel so intense a need to find a literary mother and what does Byatt try to emphasize through her portrayal of Maud as a keen reader of LaMotte? The answer to the question can be found in the lack of family, in particular, maternal ties in Maud's life. Women, who have been disregarded in the literary field as a writer and portrayed as secondary to man in literary texts, need a lineage in order to assert their generic difference and individuality. Towards the end of the novel, the reader learns that Maud's father is still alive and he is the "true

⁸Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", **Women, Writing and Teaching**, 1972, p. 18.

⁹Annegret Maack, "Wonder-Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", **Essays on The Fiction of A.S. Byatt, Imagining the Real**. Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 131.

heir"¹⁰ to LaMotte's manuscripts. He has left all of them to Maud, which means that her female heritage is passed on to her and hence meddled with by a male. The reader also learns that Maud has an old aunt called Lettice living in Cadogan Square. Apart from these, there are no other familial links mentioned. Yet identity construction is closely related to one's sense of having roots in a family, and Maud is hence provided in LaMotte with both a biological and literary ancestress, whom Maud must rediscover through the act of reading. In "True Stories and Facts in Fiction", Byatt states that "my sense of my own identity is bound up with the past, with what I read and with the way my ancestors, genetic and literary, read, in the worlds in which they lived"¹¹. She also argues that this tendency is seen not merely in the texts of writers but in the lives of all sorts of individuals. Her statement that "a preoccupation with ancestors has always been part of human make-up, and still, I think comes naturally" highlights the intrinsic need of people to find an origin for their existence. This ontological concern, which leads individuals to engage in a quest for self and women, more specifically, to search for their feminine roots, creates a need for reading. Maud Bailey epitomizes this very type of reader who is in a constant search for her origins and feels an intensive need to define her identity. Byatt and Maud reflect their need for self identification in their engagement with texts both as writers and readers¹².

In her study *The Woman Reader*, Kate Flint focuses on the woman reader and analyzes her reading practices with respect to the issues of gender and identity. In line with theories on writing that underline the role of writing as an act of self-

¹⁰A.S. Byatt, **Possession**, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 479.

¹¹A.S. Byatt, **op.cit** p.93.

¹²Then the crucial question is why myths and tales have so important a role in one's perception of the past and sense of identity. Stories are anonymous narratives and within the story of one single individual they tell us the story of humanity. As archaic entities they reflect the age-old feelings of people such as fear, anxiety, joy and the motives behind their actions. What is narrated in stories or tales is some sort of 'personal' history. The fact that single narratives have evolved and been retold over time has proven that storytelling is an attempt to make sense of one's existence in the world. In the same way, turning to stories to find answers to one's questions is the result of an ontological concern with life and existence. The interesting thing in reading stories - rather than writing or telling them - is that the reader does not necessarily approach the text with the consciousness that it may include the cure for her doubts or the answers to her self-questioning. In her quest for meanings, the reader turns to a story with a natural instinct that it will be the setting for a confrontation with the self.

expression, she draws attention to the other side of the issue, namely reading, which is often neglected. Arguing that "the activity of reading was often the vehicle through which an individual's sense of identity was achieved or confirmed"¹³, she implies that, contrary to the common view, reading is by no means a passive reception of the text. According to Flint, the woman reader's reading act, first of all, shows her free choice of the text. Just as writing becomes a medium for the woman writer to express her unmediated arguments, the text appears as a site of individuality for also the female reader. Similarly, in "A Literature of Their Own"¹⁴, Elaine Showalter draws attention to the anxious desire of women writers to find a tradition for themselves. Similar to Maud, who needs to find a surrogate mother for herself, women writers try to form a literary tradition to have a sense of belonging. Maud's reading act is motivated to a large extent by the need to replace the absence of her biological mother with a surrogate one, and, in so doing, to feel herself as part of a female world and literary tradition.

Elaine Showalter argued in the 1980s that the literature of women writers had not yet reached the status of a 'movement' due to the lack of a tradition: "Thus each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex. Given this perpetual disruption and also the self-hatred that has alienated women writers from a sense of collective identity, it does not seem possible to speak of a 'movement.'"¹⁵ Throughout the novel, there is, then, no reference to Maud's biological mother. On the other hand, maternal relationships are touched upon quite frequently in the LaMotte-Ash correspondence. Indeed, maternity is one of the central motifs in *Possession*, positioning the reader-writer interaction on a maternal ground. The woman writer - predominantly represented by LaMotte in the novel - gives birth to literary texts and represents a guide or a role model for the female reader who, in the case of Maud, is in search of both her gender identity and literary mother. LaMotte's letters that reveal a lot about her writing, her relationship with her

¹³Flint, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁴Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 12.

lovers Blanche Glover and Henry Ash, and her motherhood are of utmost importance for Maud. As she gets to know more about her ancestor, Maud feels more connected to her, which in turn makes her view her own life in line with her life.

Maud's interaction with the female tradition enables a rediscovery of the female past anew, in which she is rooted and provides a sense of belonging. Similarly, LaMotte's emphasis on a female lineage underlines the lack or deformation of maternal links as a critical element in the woman reader's reception of a text. In a letter sent by Sophie to Maia upon LaMotte's death, LaMotte is presented as a literary mother also to her daughter Maia, yet one who is both absent and present only by virtue of the writing she has left behind:

"My dearest May, I have to convey some very sad news to you, which is that my dearest sister, Christabel, died very suddenly last night. She has often expressed the wish that you should have her papers and poems - you are my only daughter, and she believed strongly in the importance of handing things on through the female line."¹⁶

Yet it is also Maud who is nourished by this female legacy.

The female line that Maud tries to be a part of is unraveled by the fairy tales and stories LaMotte wrote. Maud's certain physical acts such as walking around the house, wandering in the forest or standing near a frozen lake for a long time are all reflections of a contemplating mind contemplating what it has read. Driving home one night from Sir George Bailey's house, she is greatly attracted to the atmosphere in the park she passes through. There is "a kind of cracking of cold in the woods all round, a tightening of texture, a clamping together"¹⁷ that give Maud a sense of exhilaration. The trees were planted by George Bailey, one of her ancestors, but, more importantly, the park was a frequent resting place for LaMotte, with whose spirit Maud seems to communicate in that environment. Walking through the forest that once LaMotte passed through gives her no less a thrill than reading her poems and letters. It is a moment of identification with her ancestor. In this part of the novel focusing on Maud's emotional response to nature, which apparently reiterates LaMotte's, the narrator points at her contemplation of what it is to be a woman:

¹⁶A.S. Byatt, *Possession*, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 435.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 135.

"Women, not trees, were Maud's true pastoral concern. Her idea of these primeval creatures included her generation's sense of their imminent withering and dying, under the drip of acid rain, or in the invisible polluted gusts of the wind."¹⁸ The trees stand there like surviving witnesses of the past and she, as a member of another generation, has a feeling of exhilaration in finding herself as a part of the past. She defines her curiosity about the past as a "ghostly" existence living amidst the "young vitality of the past."¹⁹ Her interest in LaMotte's life is so lively and so gripping that it makes the past and the life of a now dead poet more real than the present.

In this part of the narrative, the narrator uses the language of gothic narratives in order to highlight Maud's feelings of enchantment and identification with nature and LaMotte. Walking through the forest, she thinks the dead leaves on the ground are alive and have a separate existence from the reality of the present. These leaves are reminiscent of LaMotte and her rewriting of the story of the Sibyl who wrote her prophecies on leaves. In the park, Maud is thus in search of both poet-prophets, LaMotte and the Sibyl, who are also her literary ancestors.

When she returns home the same night, having contemplated LaMotte a great deal, Maud remembers one of the poet's ambiguous passages in which she mentions a riddle. The riddle makes one think about a fragile thing "in white and Gold with life in the middle of it."²⁰ LaMotte likens herself to that riddle saying that she is her own riddle. Through that riddle, she shows herself as vulnerable and protecting herself from the life around her, or patriarchal society, with a white shell. The thing she continuously protects is her "solitude" as it is the very thing women are in danger of losing. Maud remembers this riddle the moment she enters her house after her study with Roland and sees two letters on the desk. Thinking about her teamwork with Roland and criticizing herself for being too bossy towards him, she realizes that people make her feel uneasy. Like her ancestor LaMotte, she also feels that her personal space is violated. In fact, towards the end of the novel, she tells Roland: "I

¹⁸Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 136.

²⁰Ibid., p. 137.

write about liminality. Thresholds.Bastions.Fortresses”²¹ that shall keep out the male intruder. It is, then, also through LaMotte’s poetry, that Maud reads her own life and anxieties.

Certain intertexts inserted into *Possession* appear as links that connect Maud to her ancestor and shows the reader of *the* novel the quasi mother-daughter relationship between the woman reader and the woman writer. They also highlight both LaMotte and Maud’s common concern with reading and/or writing as a means for women to construct for themselves a sense of their female identity and relation with patriarchal society. LaMotte's poem *Cumaeen Sibyl* uncovers the woman writer's desire for isolation and a world of her own. Likewise, her *Glass Coffin* stands out as a text which provides Maud with a shelter in times of self-crisis. The text exemplifies the relation of the woman reader/writer to fairy tales. Both texts, in a way, reflect the unease of the woman and her subsequent desire for confinement. The fulfillment of this desire results in a productive act of writing which is an act of self-expression for the woman/ writer. The *Threshold* chapter of *Possession* presents yet another text which is rewritten by LaMotte with a need to go beyond literary and social conventions. By rewriting the tale in a way that defies the rules of necessity regarding the act of narrating a story, LaMotte opens up space for her and her women readers to contemplate their her identity, frustrations and desires. Once the rules of necessity are dismissed, the traditional course of women’s stories can be changed.

1.2. *Cumaeen Sibyl*

Confinement and the comfort of solitude are subjects frequently dwelled upon throughout the narrative. LaMotte wrote poems about isolation and the feeling of apprehension she felt when she was with people. Talking to Roland about her relation to LaMotte's poems, Maud explains that one of the poems has become the "touchstone" in her choice of LaMotte's poetry as her research area. The poem called “Cumaeen Sibyl” is quite dark in tone as it is about a little girl confined in a jar and waiting there for her death. LaMotte’s poem is a rewriting of the many myths woven

²¹Ibid., p. 506.

around the Cumaean Sibyl, also called by the mythical name Deiphobe. The woman reader/writer identifies herself with a female figure that has had various representations ranging from a poet-prophetess under the influence of a deity, or a priestess to even a seducer. Indeed, the Sibyll emerges as the other of the female reader/writer, representing their repressed selves. Her otherness is underscored by the fact that she is a mythical figure who is supposed to have lived in a different culture and time and defied patriarchy. She is mostly known for her nine Sibylline Books containing oracles which were consulted by the senate in ancient Rome. When the 'male' body politic refused to buy her books, she burnt them, until only three were left and bought and afterwards destroyed altogether. We see a poet-prophetess, the ancestress of women poets and writers use her writing as instrumental in both her negotiations with patriarchal society and attempt to direct its politics. So although she lives secluded in a cave to protect her independence, she does wish to have a say in her society.

Just as Mary Shelley positions herself as "figuratively the daughter of the vanished Sybil, the primordial prophetess who mythically conceived all women artists"²², LaMotte, the young girl in her Sibyl poem, and Maud emerge as still other descendants of this mythic female figure. They are all descendants of the Cumaean Sibyl searching for the scattered leaves she is also said to have written her oracles upon. Yet this female legacy is submerged. They, moreover, share her dilemma: the desire, on the one hand, to preserve their freedom as women/writers in seclusion, in a cave or jar, and, on the other, to play a role in their society. In "The Parables of the Cave", Gilbert and Gubar examine different reworkings of the Sibyl in her cave, Mary Shelley's reworking presenting us with a protagonist visiting the cave in 1818. The Cumaean Sibyl in Mary Shelley's account of the cave entered "a mysterious, almost inaccessible chamber" and when Shelley entered the same cave, she found three leaves and on them she and her male friend discovered some writings. Gubar and Gilbert point out that those leaves reveal "the woman writer's own anxieties

²²Gilbert, Sandra & Gubar, Susan. "The Parables of the Cave", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, p. 96.

about her equivocal position in a patriarchal literary culture which often seems to her to enact strange rituals and speak in an unknown language"²³. Yet it is also the Sibyl who, in search of independence, speaks a strange language. The cave emerges as "a female space" filled primarily with the Sibylline leaves. This place of creativity and productivity "belonged to a female hierophant, the lost Sibyl, the prophetess"²⁴ who hides herself in her autonomous space and proves her artistic abilities. This interpretation by Gilbert and Gubar of the cave as a female space runs the risk of showing woman as a self-imprisoned individual since it is the woman herself who willingly confines herself within her "cave" in order to be free from the pressures of a patriarchal society. This reality of confinement is also seen in LaMotte's poem of the Cumaean Sibyl, in which she describes the Sibyl as "safe in her jar, no one could touch her."²⁵ When Roland reads LaMotte's poem out loud and comments that it is a sad one, Maud replies that young girls are generally sad because they actually choose the state of isolation to feel stronger. This sense of sadness is no different from the sadness Mary Shelly feels upon reading the "leaves" of the Cumaean Sibyl, which seem to speak of women's simultaneous desire to be hidden from and part of their societies.

Certain lines from LaMotte's poetry underscore the similarity between Maud's and her ancestor's view of life and give us clues to understand the nature of her relationship with Roland and men in general. Maud's reading LaMotte's poem about the other lurking in the woman writer/reader enables her to hear her own voice within the lines as it is the language of a timeless 'woman writer'. It is the desire of the woman writer to belong to a literary tradition so as not to feel thwarted among her male counterparts. Adrienne Rich argues in her article that "the active discouragement and thwarting of her needs by a culture controlled by males has created problems for the woman writer: problems of contact with herself, problems of language and style, problems of energy and survival."²⁶ Reading LaMotte's poetry

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵A.S. Byatt, **Possession**, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p.54.

²⁶Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", **Women, Writing and Teaching**, p. 20.

and writing essays on her not only give Maud a sense of protection as she can withdraw into her own world, but also provide a space for her encounter with other women/writers, who went before her and ultimately, with herself.

The first lines of each stanza in *Cumaeen Sibyl* show us the questioning self in Maud, the reader:

*“Who are you?
Who were you?
What do you see?
What do you hope”*²⁷

Maud's interest in LaMotte's poetry starts with *Cumaeen Sibyl* as she finds the same questions troubling her mind in the lines of this woman poet. LaMotte, the woman writer of the Victorian period, desires to keep her ancestress' texts alive and thus tries to read, decipher, and rewrite the Sibyl's leaves that might have provided answers to these questions. Like the Sibyl she also strives for an identity as a woman writer who dares to go beyond all social expectations, even defying social norms called taboos²⁸. She creates a secluded life that she only shares with her companion Blanche Glover. The cave motif, in this respect, forms an analogy between the Sibyl and LaMotte in that both represent the kind of woman who enters a "cave" for the sake of maintaining her integrity and having a sense of her identity. Maud is representative of yet another generation, living in the 20th century and trying to read, comprehend, and interpret what their ancestress wrote to understand themselves as women. As noted above, she writes of fortresses which shall protect her from the impositions of patriarchal society. Maud states, upon reading the poem, that women have a "paradoxical desire to be let out into unconfined space, the wild moorland, the open ground, and at the same time to be closed into tighter and tighter impenetrable small spaces."²⁹

²⁷A.S. Byatt, **Possession**, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p.54.

²⁸LaMotte has a sensuous relationship which can also be called lesbian in nature with Blanche Glover.

²⁹A.S. Byatt, **Possession**, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p.54.

In the poem, LaMotte underlines the Sibyl's desire to be free from the guidance of patriarchal society and use her own voice rather than that imposed on her:

*"Who were you?
The gold god goaded me
Sang shrieking sang high
His heat corroded me
Not mine his cry."*³⁰

A prophetess, she is supposed to prophecy under the inspiration of a male god, she becoming a sort of spirit medium or puppet releasing his words into the realm of mortals. Like her, LaMotte, the sibyl in LaMotte's poem, and Maud desire to find and raise their own voice from deep within her and again, in isolation from society. This is the very dilemma the woman/writer faces in that she runs the risk of imprisoning herself while trying to construct for herself a female identity. The reader of *Possession*, just like Maud, can enter LaMotte's confined world through the texts she wrote and Maud's contemplation of them. The affinity Maud finds between her own thoughts and those of LaMotte indicates, to the reader of *Possession*, the similar dynamics of being a woman reader/writer in different time periods and sharing the same concerns.

In *Possession*, LaMotte's allegedly lesbian relationship with B. Glover and her dedication to writing is a sign of an autonomous self that is threatened when she falls in love and under the literary influence of Ash. Yet she decides to leave him and their romance behind thinking that it is a threat to her writing career. Maud who evinces a great interest in LaMotte's life and writing, too, encounters a difficulty when trying to reconcile her academic career with the possibility of a romance with Roland. The fact that she does not give up the idea of romance, rejecting to see it as altogether a hindrance to her writing, shows that she reenacts her ancestor's experiences as a woman but seeks to resolve the opposition between writing and romance. Going through the same inner crisis - feeling apprehensive that she will lose her autonomy - Maud enters the "cave" of her ancestor and finds her way

³⁰Ibid., p. 54.

through the leaves LaMotte left. Thus, Maud's story is "the story of the woman artist who enters the cavern of her own mind and finds there the scattered leaves not only of her own power but of the tradition which might have generated that power"³¹. Regarding the relationship between the woman writer and her ancestor, Gilbert and Gubar adds that the "body of her precursor's art, and thus the body of her own art, lies in pieces around her, dismembered, dis-remembered, disintegrated"³². They further ask "how can she remember it and become a member of it, join it and rejoin it, integrate it and in doing so achieve her own integrity, her own selfhood?"³³. Maud must thus re/member what has been severed and resolve the dilemma in women's lives that force them to sacrifice either love or artistic/intellectual productivity.

Although we are rarely directly presented Maud's response to LaMotte's poems, the narrative of *Possession* is full of minute details from Maud's daily life that are placed in such a way as to complement the passages she reads. These details suggest in what way LaMotte's writing give direction to Maud's life. The reader of *Possession* makes two simultaneous readings since Maud's personal life - her experiences as a reader, a feminist researcher, Fergus's ex-lover, and Roland's partner - is read as a text as well. Similarly, Maud reads her present life as a text, comparing it to that of LaMotte. Just after the passage in which Maud and Roland discuss "Cumaeen Sibyl" with respect to the notions of confinement and freedom, there is a passage in which a simple shower scene triggers Maud's memory of her relationship with Fergus and hints at her fear of a relationship with men. After reading some passages by and about LaMotte, she and Roland stop studying for that night and Roland enters the bathroom to have a shower before going to sleep. When Maud enters the same bathroom after Roland and stands under the hot water, she sees the image of an untidy bed which reminds her of her problematic relationship with Fergus. The untidy bed as reminiscent of sexual union emerges as an opposite of the Sibyl's cave or jar, which allow for autonomy. The bed is now visualized as a

³¹Gilbert, Sandra & Gubar, Susan, "The Parables of the Cave", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 98.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

battleground and it makes her remember a famous quotation from Freud: "desire lies on the other side of repugnance."³⁴ The feeling she has towards Fergus is nothing other than revulsion and she now directs her anger towards him to herself as she could not help having an affair with a man who caused her to devalue herself as a literary scholar and a woman. In this passage, the reader reads the protagonist's confrontation with herself and her questioning of her past. The enclosed meaning of this passage is found in the preceding passage about Maud's reading of *Cumaean Sibyl*. Maud shares the Sibyl's desire to be self-confined and away from people's controlling gaze on her. She confronts her adverse feelings towards her affair with Fergus in the bathroom, a private, closed/confined space giving her a sense of protection.

The significance of the bathroom scene also lies in the role water imagery plays in the narrative. Water is a motif used to pinpoint those moments of inner questioning and self-realization. Both in the bathroom and the lake scene, the female protagonists contemplate deeply their womanhood. The close relationship between water imagery and being a woman is explicitly shown in one of Fergus's letter to Maud. In the letter, he directs at her the question "why is water always seen as the female?"³⁵Fergus's attempt to find an answer to his own question highlights the unsettling aspects of being a woman as well as the difficulty a woman has in defining her identity. Fergus alludes to fabled women characters who live in the sea: melusinas, women who are fish-shaped from the waist down and are "perceived as dangerous", to women "drowned" in the city, and to "the woman/dragon stirring the waters of the large marble bath."³⁶They exemplify how female identity is constructed as fluid and hence irrational and uncontrollable, their bodies lactating, menstruating and thus overstepping proper boundaries. They are presented as deformed and dangerous to the patriarchal order founded on reason and control. The "woman/dragon" imagery also reminds one of what Gilbert and Gubar refer to as the

³⁴A.S. Byatt, **Possession**, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p.56.

³⁵Ibid., p. 139.

³⁶Ibid., p. 139.

unheard voice of the "madwoman"³⁷ in her fierce struggle for her identity. Fergus, too, associates water with the female body and sexuality. Female sexuality is dynamic in nature and it is in a continuous struggle to realize itself. At the same time the female, just like the uncontrollable water, reflects the feelings and thoughts she carries inside to the one across her. Like the Sibyl, who has acquired various connotations in a number of myths and tales, women in literature have been represented in numerous forms ranging from ghost, witch, dragon, and serpent to angel and fairy. Women's struggle to exist by herself rejecting all the masks imposed on her by males and develop an autonomous identity, then, leads to society's demonization of them.

1.3. The Fairy Melusina

LaMotte's epic poem "The Fairy Melusina" is another intertext inserted into *Possession* that shows the poet's interest in the intertextual webs of literature about-demonized- women preceding her. Melusina is a fairy in medieval French romance who metamorphoses into a woman with a fishtail, or a mermaid. She marries Count Raymond of Poitiers in her human shape, but exacts from him the promise that he will shun her on Sundays, when she reverts to a mermaid. Yet he secretly seeks her out when she takes a bath, which causes her to leave their castle. Making a rereading and rewriting of an epic poem and using its figure of a fairy with strong desires in her own poem reinforces the fact that Maud is different from an ordinary 19th century woman reader/writer and calls for a feminist reading of her text. "The Fairy Melusina" is a poem "she rewrote at least several times."³⁸ LaMotte's reading of the epic is quite contrary to the expected conventions of the time, which rejected to see women as people of free will and a questioning mind, and stands out as a radical initiative seeking to free the woman reader from the constraints of norms.

Flint points at the unspoken yet long-held rules in society that women should be protected from the effect of certain texts as they are vulnerable to emotional

³⁷Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984.

³⁸A.S. Byatt, **Possession**, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 36.

breakdowns or even worse to appeals to rise up against the system. "The Fairy Melusina" is such a 'threatening' text because it urges the woman reader to be aware of her submerged womanhood, of her desires for freedom and worries as a woman. The reader of *Possession* first encounters the poem through the reading of Ash's wife, Ellen Ash. Although apparently conventional and submissive, Ellen is one of the women characters in *Possession* who, as Susanne Becker argues, are "marginalized women"³⁹ that have the function of challenging "those patriarchal power structures".⁴⁰ Ellen Ash's position in *Possession* is defined in line with her relationship with her husband, Henry Ash, who seeks to create an 'Angel in the House' out of her. Ellen Ash's reading of "The Fairy Melusina" gives us both clues regarding to what extent her identity as a woman is defined by her husband and also leads one to a comparison of two women's reading of the same poem.

When Roland starts to read Ellen Ash's journal in Beatrice Nest's office in chapter seven, he finds notes about her reading experience and her enchantment. She defines "The Fairy Melusina" as a "beautiful and daring poem."⁴¹ For Ellen, the poem is full of vigor and has a fairy tale tone. The reason behind her fascination is linked with the fact that she can situate herself within the poem. The narrator describes her reading act as a picture coming to life in front of her eyes. Ellen Ash is a woman reader whose reading experience triggers the need, or rather the desire, to talk/write in a confessional tone. The following passage that Roland reads is indeed a note of confession written by Ellen upon her reading of the poem. She reveals that once in the past she wanted to be "a Poet and a Poem"⁴² ending up neither. Ellen's desire to be the Poem can be read as both the expression of an intrinsic need to be visible and acknowledged by her husband, the poet Ash. Rather than being regarded as the angel of the house, she wants to be an active part of the writing process, playing a role in the poet's creation of the poem. She also seeks to situate herself in the body of a defiant mermaid, to find a voice in her and create herself a poem.

³⁹Susanne Becker, "Postmodernism's Happy Ending", **Engendering Realism and Postmodernism: Contemporary Women Writers in Britain**, Ed. by. Beate Neumeier, *Postmodern Studies* 32, 2001, p. 23.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴¹A.S. Byatt, **Possession**, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 122.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 122.

Regarding her wish to be both the Poem and the Poet, she states that it is the desire of "all reading women"⁴³ and women aspiring to become poets themselves. Her desire to be both the Poem and the Poet indicates that in order to create a poem, the woman reader is to find her own voice in the poem she reads, rather than to be seen as a meek partner in the house and a passive recipient of the text.

Ellen's preservation of the "daring" poem, which is full of enchantment, is, then, suggestive of her act of rising up against confining patriarchal norms. Her reading of "The Fairy Melusina" arouses strong feelings of joy and enchantment:

"Today I laid down Melusina having come trembling to the end of this marvelous work. What shall I say of it? It is truly original, although the general public may have trouble in recognizing its genius, because it makes no concession to vulgar frailties of imagination, and because its virtues are so far removed in some ways at least from those expected of the weaker sex."⁴⁴

Maud's reading, sharing a similar concern with the woman reader's quest for her own voice in the text, is given as a part of her research study on LaMotte. There is not a direct reference to Maud's reading of "The Fairy Melusina"; however, from the letters she receives from other scholars, Fergus and Leonora Stern, and her conversations with Roland, it is understood that the issues that the poem underlines about women are also what Maud is concerned with.

"The Fairy Melusina" presents a reading of "women ... as dangerous"⁴⁵, or alternatively as dissenting and hence distorted into a monstrous figure and a threat to the system. LaMotte accentuates the artificial division of Melusina into two: an "Unnatural Monster" insisting on privacy and autonomy as well as a loving woman. In her former role, Melusina is a figure casting dread among men:

⁴³Ibid., p. 122.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 120.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 139.

*“But let the Power take a female form
And 'tis the Power is punished. All men shrink
From dire Medusa and herwrithinglocks.”⁴⁶*

Yet unlike the Medusa, Melusina does not turn her voyeuristic husband to stone, but disappears from their home. LaMotte and Maud must, then, seek to heal woman, who is either praised as the angel in the house or, when insisting on emancipation from patriarchal norms, loathed as a monstrous figure living in exile, in the dark waters.

In one of the letters she writes to Ash, LaMotte explains the story of how and why she has started to write Melusina. Its conception goes back to the time when she was a child, listening to her father who told tales better than "any other Papa or Mama."⁴⁷ She likens him to the "Ancient Mariner", a significant detail which links *Possession* to Byatt's other intertextual work, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*⁴⁸. LaMotte's first encounter with the story of Melusina, a female legacy, is thus brought about by a male who functions as an ambiguous figure, a storyteller who both encourages and intimidates the writer in her. In her last letter to Ash, LaMotte, who seems to suffer from the anxiety of authorship in the presence of powerful male story-tellers, defines her poems as "poor" products that can never be considered as equals of Ash's poems. She writes: "Did you ever read, I wonder, one of the few poor exemplars sold of "The Fairy Melusina" and think - I knew her once - or as you most truly might - 'Without me this Tale might not have come to the Telling?"⁴⁹ Again, she credits her father, who has kept the tale alive, for having done something quite similar to what the Brothers Grimm did for the German people when collecting fairy tales in a body of work. Although she will not take credit for her Melusina poem, it does allow her and future generations of women to contemplate their positions in a system that demonizes women who demand autonomy. Moreover, this poem, too, alleviates the burden of the sense of a misplaced mother.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 292.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 173.

⁴⁸In *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, The Ancient Mariner, who appears disguised as the museum guide, is one of the intertextual links of the narrative.

⁴⁹A.S. Byatt, *Possession*, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 501.

Maud is another reader of LaMotte's Melusina poem. It is understood in Leonora's letter that female autonomy and sexuality are what Maud is mostly concerned with in her papers and studies. As Leonora writes in the letter, the water imagery in the poem is their main point of discussion regarding LaMotte's works. Maud, too, associates the water imagery with the female, which also explains why she is so much involved in thoughts about womanhood while standing near the frozen lake and imagining LaMotte submerged in it. Her and Leonora's interpretation of LaMotte's poem *The City of Is*, which is also full of water imagery and uses a drowned city as its main motif, sheds further light on Maud's reaction to the water imagery in the Melusina poem. Their interpretation of the *The City of Isis* that "the drowned women in the city might represent the totality of the female body as an erogenous zone if the circumambient fluid were seen as an undifferentiated eroticism."⁵⁰ The sexually and, when considering the biblical story of the fall, intellectually, liberated woman is considered a threat to patriarchal culture founded on reason. Maud's reading of LaMotte's works brings together a parallel reading of her own womanhood. The thoughts that come into her mind at Seal Court, looking at the lake, "this frozen surface"⁵¹ reminds her of the drowned women in LaMotte's poem and her own sense of being unable to move freely in her life and enjoy her female sexuality.

*"A paradox of chilly fire
Of life in death, of quenched desire
That has no force, e'en to respire
Suspended until frost retire-"⁵²*

The fishes submerged in the waters in the poem represent Maud, who is indeed considered frigid by Roland upon their first encounter. What she needs and desires to see in the lake is "the woman/dragon stirring the waters of the large marble bath"⁵³ in LaMotte's poem to bring her back to life. As a woman unsure about how to define her own womanhood and a woman reader/writer in need of an ancestral text sharing the

⁵⁰Ibid., p.139.

⁵¹Ibid., p.141.

⁵²Ibid., p.142.

⁵³Ibid., p.139.

same concerns, Maud reads in it her own life and tries to constitute a new understanding of it. In other words, LaMotte's text responds to the needs of its female reader who is, in Adrienne Rich's terms, "looking eagerly for guides."⁵⁴

1.4. The Threshold

"The Threshold" is one of the stories in *Possession* rewritten by LaMotte. It makes up the ninth chapter of *Possession*, "The Threshold". By implication, the name makes one consider reading as an unsettling but potentially also liberating act that might ultimately usher in the hope of renewal. It suggests transgression and transition. It is a conventional tale which tells the story of a man, Childe, who is left with a necessity to choose among three fairies, as reminiscent of the myth according to which Paris had to announce one among three goddesses as the most beautiful. As the name of the story suggests, the character is on the threshold of a decision and the tale interrogates whether he will choose the fairy by his free will or under the influence of "the power of necessity in tales."⁵⁵ Byatt comments, in "Old Tales, New Forms", that she has placed LaMotte as the narrative voice of the tale, letting her contemplate an act of intervention in the story seemingly driven by necessity. She argues that "Christabel's commentary was 'knowing' about inevitability"⁵⁶, but at the same time attempting to elude it. As a woman reader and a writer, LaMotte expresses her desire to rewrite the story in a new way that frees the character from the grip of the "power of necessity"⁵⁷, or patriarchal norms. Her intervention might change the course of women's lives and stories. Just like Childe, who is on the threshold of a decision, LaMotte, as the writer/narrator of the tale, has to decide between the conventional narrative with its known ending and a completely new version.

Yet the narrator yields to the rule of necessity in tales and ends the tale with Childe choosing the leaden fairy instead of the golden one. The narrator, having read

⁵⁴Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" **Women, Writing and Teaching**, p. 21.

⁵⁵A.S. Byatt, **Possession**, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 155.

⁵⁶A. S. Byatt, "Old Tales, New Forms", **On Histories and Stories**, Selected Essays. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p.131.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 131

tales with conventional endings, however, expresses her desire to write them anew. The readers of the tale - Maud, Roland, and the reader of *Possession* - notice the narrator's contemplation of an unconventional intervention of the narrator and her desire to go beyond the necessity of fate and rewrite the tale in her own way:

"And one day we will write it otherwise, that he would not come, that he stayed, or chose the sparkling ones, or went out again onto the moors to live free of fate, if such can be. But you must know now, that it turned out as it must turn out, must you not? Such is the power of necessity in tales."⁵⁸

To explain it in Adrienne Rich's words, reading the past in a different way is to challenge its passive hold over the present and to assign a renewing role to it: "We need to know the writ-ing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us."⁵⁹ Maud's reading LaMotte's romance-like texts does not result in a blind identification with the past, rather it helps her make a reevaluation of how she lives her present life. With every text she encounters, she questions her view of life and where she situates herself in it. *The Threshold* is, then, read by Maud - and by the readers of *Possession* as well - as a tale of inner questioning that might bring renewal. The story, then, uses the motif of standing at or passing a threshold as symbolizing a crucial period when important decisions are to be made in one's life. Rewriting, which can resolve traumatic tales by and about women into tales of hope, can contribute to a discursive revision of women's identities and roles in society and literature.

Byatt comments in "On Stories and Histories" that in the old world of traditional tales and in the voice of a Victorian woman protagonist, she writes the tale of an ever-present truth: our lives are ruled by the "power of necessity"⁶⁰. The narrator in the tale is standing at a threshold and desires to go beyond it in order to challenge the use of stock female figures and themes in tales. But the reader of *Possession* discovers LaMotte's lack of confidence in her own writings, which

⁵⁸A.S. Byatt, *Possession*, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 155.

⁵⁹Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", *Women, Writing and Teaching*, p. 18.

⁶⁰A. S. Byatt, "The Greatest Story Ever Told", *On Histories and Stories, Selected Essays*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p. 155.

prevents her from making actual changes in the tale and keeps her at a threshold. She describes herself as "a poor breathless woman with no staying-power"⁶¹. The object of rewriting old tales and thus discursively constructing a new identity for women is a difficult one and only partially fulfilled, indeed a life-long endeavour.

Maud is, then, a typical example of a woman who looks for a strong female figure in real life and literature in order to identify with. Maud's reading the texts written by LaMotte enables her to hear her own voice within the lines as it is the language of a timeless 'woman writer'. The female literary tradition owes its strength to the chance it gives to women writers and readers to find their own voices and to hear the voices of their female ancestors and sister. In "When We Dead Awaken", Adrienne Rich explains this crucial function of women's act of reading a text by a woman writer as one woman's honoring the "gifts" - the gift of free speech, of free expression, and an autonomous identity - of another woman. The woman reader "goes to poetry or fiction looking for her way of being in the world, since she too has been putting words and images together; she is looking eagerly for guides, maps possibilities"⁶² and, as noted above, thresholds promising transition. LaMotte found it impossible to reconcile her love for Ash, or romance, with her life as a woman/writer who creates in seclusion. At the ending of *Possession*, after her reading of LaMotte's works, her modern descendant Maud not only discovers her maternal origins in the Victorian poet, but affirms and contests the possibility of such reconciliation in her own life. She sleeps with Roland but thinks to herself:

"If he went out of the room it would be grey and empty.
If he did not go out of it, how could she concentrate?"⁶³

Maud is thus still self-divided: she is ready to change her life and let Roland in, but remains uncompromising in her desire for intellectual production. Yet they plan to edit LaMotte's papers together, thus embracing the project of bringing to the limelight women's literary tradition as a common one. Her reading experience has

⁶¹A.S. Byatt, *Possession*, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p.161.

⁶²Rich, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁶³A.S. Byatt, *Possession*, London, Vintage Books, 2009, p. 430.

thus triggered in Maud a greater awareness of what women want: a full life and humanity that includes romance and creativity.



CHAPTER II

THE DJINN IN THE NIGHTINGALE'S EYE: NARRATING THE TALES OF THE PAST

2.1. "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye"

With its four rewritten tales and title story, A.S.Byatt's *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* is an intertextual novelette that is mainly about the act of storytelling as a means of reviewing and revising the construction of female identity. The protagonist of the tale "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", Gillian Perholt, is a narratologist, a reader of a massive tradition of fairy tales and myths from a variety of sources from different cultures and literatures as well as stories about stories. She also rewrites the texts she reads and, in doing so, questions the place of women in life and literature. Thus, with its emphasis on rewriting, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* narrates the older protagonist's quest for a meaningful female identity, which would ease her struggle against her fear of death and futility.

Gillian, "a woman in her fifties, past child bearing, whose two children were adult now"¹, was brought up in the conventional world of the mid 20th century, and is now confronted with the need to affirm her identity as a woman/narratologist. The fear of death is the main motive behind Gillian's reading about and rewriting women's lives and intellectual production. She acknowledges herself that "lately I've had a sense of my fate - my death, that is - waiting for me, manifesting itself from time to time, to remind me it's there."² Throughout the narrative Gillian is portrayed as at unease with the idea of her mortality and cannot come to terms with the notions of Fate and death. Gillian's striving to avoid and even outdo death can be read in line with the need to ascertain her identity since she has experienced, as a woman in the

¹A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 101.

²Ibid., p. 167.

social and literary world, a metaphorical death already feeling like "a being of secondary order."³ On the one hand, as Maack argues, Gillian places "herself as a 'being of secondary order' because the fictions she re-enacts demonstrate the cognitive function of rewriting and retelling".⁴ On the other hand, Gillian suffers from a sense of being superfluous in a man's world. Gilbert and Gubar note that what Milton wrote "the story of woman's secondness, her otherness, and how that otherness leads inexorably to her demonic anger, her sin, her fall, and her exclusion from that garden of the gods which is also, for her, the garden of poetry"⁵. Deserted by her husband and her children and thus denied the roles of wife and mother, to which she was not altogether reconciled, as well as unable to situate herself in a post-modern world, her occupation as a narratologist, however, helps her to be heard and visible again and to make sense of her life. Rewriting the stories she listens to or reads, then, enables her to do both engage with female identity and elude death and meaninglessness since the act of retelling avoids closure.

The need to narrate stories and the role of reading in one's engagement in literature are frequently underlined in Byatt's female protagonists. In *Possession*, the need to reconcile with her identity leads the woman readers/writers to undertake a literary quest for a link with the literary tradition. In *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, a similar need for self-affirmation makes the female protagonist start on a journey for a literary conference about women's lives which turns into a metaphorical journey into her inner world as a woman. The reader of Byatt's intertextual work starts to witness Gillian's journey and becomes a part of it by being presented with a rich reading of fairy tales, myths and poems. In Byatt's works, reading and writing appear in the form of the female protagonist's relationship with ancestral texts which have proved immortal. In *Possession* the female protagonist seeks to find a link to the past through the texts written by her literary and biological

³Ibid., p. 96.

⁴Annegret Maack, "Wonder-Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*", **Essays on The Fiction of A.S. Byatt, Imagining the Real**. Ed. By. Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble. London: Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 131.

⁵Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, "Milton's Bogey: Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, p. 191.

ancestor. Gillian also feels the need to find a connection to the past as it will enable her to have an understanding of the male's oppression of the female in both the social and literary world. Gillian's main trouble has to do with the social construction of female gender in society, and the female figures she encounters in the texts all reveal to her the literal and metaphorical imprisonment of women and their struggles against it. Byatt's female protagonists have a sense of displacement in their present lives and they are placed within the intertextual webs of the narrative struggling to 'belong' to a female tradition. Gillian's displacement as a woman is further intensified by her fear of death since she worries about dying without proving herself as a woman apt at narrating stories. Prior to her encounter with the djinn, who narrates her stories about strong female figures like Zefir and the Queen of Sheba, she sees herself as a woman unable to write fiction since her "imagination failed"⁶ and most importantly her own life-story.

Troubled by what Gilbert and Gubar defines as the "anxiety of authorship", Gillian refrains from writing fiction and unable to have a place in literature, she is now occupied with her fear of death, or obliteration as a woman. The woman writer has always been seen as "a woman anomalous, indefinable, alienated, a freakish outsider"⁷ in the patriarchal literary world. Gillian mentions her attempts to write a story about "a young man, called Julian who was in hiding, disguised as a girl called Julienne"⁸, reflecting the gender confusion she found herself in when very young. The impositions of the patriarchy on women and stigmatization as misfits in society and literature render her attempt at writing a story abortive. It is only as a middle-aged woman, when she hears from the djinn - obviously a male - stories of powerful women that she makes another attempt.

Her relationship with the djinn, who calls her "Djil-yanPeri-han", as a nice reference to the fairies in traditional eastern tales, frees her from the imposition of

⁶A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 233.

⁷Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar. "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship", *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, p.48.

⁸A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 232.

patriarchal reason, thus liberating her narrative powers. Jane Campbell suggests that with her eastern name, Gillian, moreover, "becomes also a magical figure, a peri (a Persian elf) in a tale."⁹ So she eventually emerges as both narrator and protagonist. As a result of her relationship with the djinn, she can now understand the subtle message hidden in the djinn's question, "what does an independent woman wish for?"¹⁰ An independent woman has the freedom to wish anything for herself. By using her last right to make a wish to release the djinn from his imprisonment, Gillian shows that she feels complete as a woman and in her tale.

Gillian's encounter with the djinn constitutes a crucial part in her quest since it brings a confrontation with her fears and requires a redefinition of her identity. A woman troubled by the idea of death, Gillian is also a female born in the early second half of the 20th century, which imposed a traditional gender politics. In a postmodern world in which the so-called 'grandnarratives' are now unable to account for the present reality of the world characterized by fragmentation, she has to recover a sense of her identity as a woman and make sense of her existence. Satellite television, the fax machine, the live tennis match she watches, and developing technology in general are suggestive of a more confusing post-modern world in which a sense of identity is being obscured. Writing and reading emerge as a secure ground where the individual tries to find ways to cope with her challenges. Writing and reading in a time defined by "postmodern intertextuality" help the reader travel back and forth through time and revise her present by reevaluating her and other, real and fictitious, women's past. Linda Hutcheon argues that "postmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context."¹¹ Like in *Possession*, in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* the relationship between past and present of women is interrogated, and reading and writing are placed within the intricate webs of this relationship. Gillian's final narration of her past to the djinn alleviates her anxieties, her fear of being obliterated as a woman and made redundant.

⁹Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 206.

¹¹Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, New York and London, 1988, p. 118.

Byatt's use of various fairy tales to construct her narrative and her play with, rather than rewriting of, them show that there is a constant interplay between past and present or reality and fiction. An engagement with literature alleviates the burden of one's mortality by eliminating the borders between time periods. Her feeling that her worries are shared by women/ writers or story-tellers belonging to a different time and place explains Gillian's thirst for and engagement with more texts. The point to be noted here is that the individual can have a sense of her 'real' life by reading and writing 'fiction'. *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* blends fiction and reality in numerous passages, making the reader see fiction, for instance fairy tales, as a new reading of the reality of women's lives. In the hotel room where Gillian sleeps with the djinn, in the museum where she meets the "ancient mariner", and at the ancient site of Ephesus where she is overcome by the fear of mortality, the reader encounters fantastic elements in the real world of the female narratologist. In the narrative of the book, fairy tales help Gillian come to terms with her identity as a woman as well as reality and death.

When Gillian sees the Virgin used as decoration at a nightclub in Istanbul and the statues of the goddesses in Ephesus, when she listens to innumerable tales during her travel in Turkey, she comes to feel as if they are all about one single old woman who is Virgin Mary, the Syria Dea, a Hindu deity, Venus, Artemis, Ishtar, or Cybele at the same time. They all represent a mortal mother reminding her of her own mortality, but also of women's power and gifts. Maack speaks of "Gillian Perholt's vision of the mother-god [which] comprehends both the continuity of myth", we might say the multifaceted myth woven around female figures, "and the finite nature of the individual"¹².

Gillian's fear of death is caused by her desire to be able to have a place in the literary world as a woman before her life comes to an end. Hadley notes that

¹²Annegret Maack, "Wonder-Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*", *Essays on The Fiction of A.S. Byatt, Imagining the Real*, Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 125.

"Storytelling is a form of desire, and as such is the only way to portray and explain the self. Multiple stories teach her the potential for multiple metaphorical identities"¹³. With the snake image in Gillian's tale - and in many of the stories she knows as well - Byatt highlights the difficulty women writers encounter in the male literary world. The snake made of words that continually appears to her on the plane to Turkey is a frequent image she remembers from her readings of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, Milton appears as a literary name Gillian has read; however, the name itself represents more than a male writer since "Milton" - put in quotation marks - is the representation of an entire patriarchal literary culture. Gillian must 'transcend' those images imposed on her - on women writers - by patriarchal literature. Annegret Maack states that in "Byatt's iconography, glass, flower, and serpent stand for the imagination and for the activity of writing."¹⁴ Yet Milton's snake represents womankind's fallen state. Calling men's fear of and anger at women as "the black snake", she argues that they see the power of women's writing or speech as dangerous and threatening. The snake is also the serpent in *Paradise Lost* telling Eve of her self-importance and power, which leads to her rising up against God. The prejudice against women's creative acts of speaking and writing is, then, rooted in a long-held assumption that women go beyond the boundaries drawn for them by the patriarchal culture and threaten it, as they transgress its norms.

Virginia Woolf comments in *A Room of One's Own*¹⁵ and Gilbert and Gubar elaborates on the same argument in "The Queen's Looking Glass", the woman writer struggles with a massive tradition characterized with an abundance of misconceptions and prejudices about women. She is either the "angel" or the "monster" in the house. In other words, she is supposed to be as good and mild as an angel in order to be accepted as a proper woman in society. Women not complying with this notion are believed to possess a monstrous, serpentine, nature. This stereotypical characterization of women is also the very reason for the timidity of

¹³Louisa Hadley, **The Fiction of A.S. Byatt**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 128.

¹⁴Annegret Maack, "Wonder-Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*", **Essays on The Fiction of A.S. Byatt, Imagining the Real**. Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble. London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 130.

¹⁵Woolf, **op. cit.**

women writers. Defining the author in a patriarchal literary tradition as "a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch"¹⁶, Gilbert and Gubar argue that writing is a painful process for the woman writer who cannot go beyond her role as an angel. Gillian is a woman writer who struggles with patriarchal notions about women occupying her mind and, remembering the gifts of mother-goddesses and other female, tries to liberate herself from the image of woman as 'monster'.

The fact that literary history has depicted women either as an angel or a monster is a significant aspect of the gender construction process and it has affected how women view themselves to a great extent. Patriarchal culture has wanted women to be and act like angels since this meek characteristic easily creates a male control over the female. Gilbert and Gubar link this desire of men to control women to an excessive fear of female autonomy. That women have the power to give birth, and thus to control life, arouses fear among men. In other words, a fear of women is explained as a rejection - on the male part - of their own weaknesses and incapability. It is evident that "male dread of women, and specifically the infantile dread of maternal autonomy, has historically objectified itself in vilification of women."¹⁷ This projection of one's fears onto the opposite sex subsequently has also caused Gillian to have an adverse sense of self in that she has tried to erase her selfhood seen as sinful and evil, and to constantly try to maintain angel-like qualities. This, however, led to a repression of her mind and body, which have thus been rendered incapable of giving birth to stories. Gillian remembers that as a young woman she saw her body "like ... a weapon, a sharp sword, I couldn't handle."¹⁸ Gilbert and Gubar observe that "The sexual nausea associated with all these monster women helps explain why so many real women have for so long expressed loathing of (or at least anxiety about) their own, inexorably female bodies"¹⁹ and, we might add, the stories of dissent they conceal.

¹⁶Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, "The Queen's Looking Glass", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984. p.6.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁸A.S. Byatt, **The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye**, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p.241.

¹⁹Sandra Gilbert & Susan Guar, "The Queen's Looking Glass", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven, Yale

2.1.1. The Fear of Death and Narrative Powers:

Storytelling or writing appears as a need of the woman/writer to struggle against a sense of her futility in patriarchal society and ultimately death. In order for the woman writer to feel the courage to take a pen in her hand, she must realize her selfhood, which will in turn give her a sense of a life worth living. The terror Gillian feels throughout the narrative stems from the lack of the sense of a complete female identity, life and selfhood. There are several instances throughout the narration in which Gillian remains speechless and shivers in silence when she cannot find words to express herself, as suggestive of patriarchy's act of stifling the woman/writer's voice. In the hotel room where she listens to the life story of the djinn, she is haunted by the djinn's request to narrate him her life: "A kind of panic overcame Dr. Perholt. It seemed to her that she had no story, none that would interest this hot person with his searching look and his restless intelligence."²⁰ Likewise, the deadly look of the statues of the goddesses she has seen in Ephesus mean nothing to her but death, which, once again, leaves her speechless:

"She was suddenly aware of every inch of her own slack and dying skin. She thought of the stone eyes of the goddess, of her dangerous dignity, of her ambiguous plump breasts, dead balls, intact eggs, wreathed round her in triumph and understood that real-unreal was not the point, that the goddess was still, and always had been, and in the foreseeable future would be more alive, more energetic, infinitely more powerful than she herself, Gillian Perholt."²¹

"The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" revolves around Gillian's confrontation with various female figures in the places she visits and the stories about the female figures the djinn tells; thus, the title story of Byatt's book is the narration of a female protagonist who is a reader of fairy tales and sees herself as one of those misconceived women that are feared, and thus silenced or killed.

In "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", Gillian epitomizes women who come to see themselves as the Other. Gillian's alienation from her aging, no longer fertile

University Press, 1984, p. 34.

²⁰A.S. Byatt, **The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye**, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p.231.

²¹Ibid., p.166.

body and also her profession as a writer shows her insecure sense of identity as a woman. Gillian's fear of aging and the panic she feels in front of the mirrors or the timeless statues of female figures exemplify the state of dependence on approval by the opposite sex. Since Gillian has just consented to her husband's wish to end their marriage and is now at an age past child bearing, she has an impaired sense of self and is in need of an affirmation of her identity as a woman. In the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, she meets a guide, apparently the djinn, who strikes her as reminiscent of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, and listens to his accounts of the female statues. The seemingly ancient male, who has suddenly emerged from behind a wall and caught her attention, takes her by the hand and shows every corner of the museum to her. Gillian is both fascinated by and resistant to this authoritative male voice. The mystery in the atmosphere of the museum turns into an apprehension and then fear as Gillian listens to him and looks at the figures of clay. The ancient mariner holds fat female figures in his hand and explains that being fat was a sign of "strength and good prospects of children".²² The figure has no hands or feet, and even no face since it is defined by a "lovely fat belly [and] breasts to feed".²³ The points he emphasizes are closely related to the centuries-long construction of female identity. Women have been valued as long as they can bear children and care about their families, a fact which reveals an emphasis on biological rather than intellectual and artistic production.

Gillian's desire to go beyond this definition of women and transgress the restrictions put on women by patriarchal culture requires a new consciousness. It at the same time reminds one of the facts that the female figures in the hand of the Ancient Mariner are emblematic of goddesses, who were, however, made redundant by male gods. Upon seeing the clay figures in the Ancient Mariner's hand, Gillian is overcome by the feeling that she has led a futile existence all through her life: "Gillian Perholt looked at the little fat dolls with their bellies and breasts, and pulled in her stomach muscles, and felt the fear of death in the muscles of her heart".²⁴ The

²²Ibid., p. 138.

²³Ibid., p. 139.

²⁴Ibid., p. 139.

fall of the goddesses and inactivity of their clay statues arouses in her a sense of lifelessness and reminds Gillian of her impending physical death. She even gets the idea that the statues are more alive and real than her own body. Since she now realizes that her life - and the lives of women in general - has never been independent of the influence of patriarchal culture, there occurs in her an ultimate feeling of disillusionment with her own life.

As a narratologist, Gillian's need to narrate or write stories is actually the result of a realization that her life seemingly does not have a story. Her memories of her past experiences as a young girl and later as a married woman, her present confrontation with a sense of failure and resulting fear of death constitute the story of her life which is not promising and satisfying. Gillian represents those women who need to write in order to have a story. The fear and anxiety that have become an intrinsic part of her identity account for their inability to have a presence in the social and literary world. As long as women are controlled by men and stripped of the authority to speak for themselves, the power of man is enhanced and his superiority is strengthened. Woolf comments that "[w]omen have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size".²⁵ This role imposed on women for the sake of the preservation of male power diminishes their sense of an autonomous individuality and identity.

Gillian flees from a life that she feels is imprisoning her and subsequently faces the difficulty of defining herself. The legacy of the patriarchal culture represented by Milton and Gillian's colleague Orhan Rifat's authoritative narrative voice, though celebrating at the conference Scheherazade, the ancestress of female story-tellers, haunts her mind leaving her with an apprehension of not being able to write. Her "protest takes the form of a refusal and a departure, a flight of escape

²⁵Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 37.

rather than an active rebellion".²⁶Gillian's escape to Ankara and her metaphorical escape into literary tales signal a quite challenging quest, a pursuit of words to tell her own life-story.

Gillian's journey exemplifies what Margaret Atwood says about writing: "all writing of the narrative kind, and perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality - by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead".²⁷ Gillian's contemplation over death throughout the narrative is given first as a fear and only later as an acknowledgement of death. As a narratologist, Gillian seeks stories of her ancestors since finding links to the past somehow gives her a sense of time and place, ridding her of the feeling of "floating redundant".²⁸Flying to Ankara for a literary conference and thinking about the safety of flying compared to other forms of travel, Gillian visualizes herself as a being "floating" in the air and remembers lines from Milton. She recalls the first time she read Milton's poem, *Paradise Lost*, and the snake that appeared in her mind as a strong visual image. Now the snake she sees as a narratologist in search of her literary origins is made up of words and phrases. It is no longer "the snake that had risen in the dark cave inside the skull of blind John Milton, but a snake, the snake, the same snake, in some sense, made of words and visible to the eye".²⁹ The scare that the snake causes is a metaphorical description of the fear of death and feeling of redundancy as a woman. The tales she reads enable her to confront her fears. The snake made of words points at the constructive role writing/storytelling has in her life. Making use of fairy tales and myths, as Gillian understands, presents us with a basic order that surrounds our lives leaving us yet enough space to act freely, thus also opening up space to direct women's stories towards a different course. Maack observes:

²⁶ Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, "The Queen's Looking Glass", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 35.

²⁷Virginia Woolf, **A Room of One's Own**, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 156.

²⁸A.S. Byatt, **The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye**, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 98.

²⁹Ibid., p. 100.

"Myths and fairy tales present models for action, but, at the same time, they present the freedom to change the plot and tell another story. Stories construct a pattern, an ordering system through which we can begin to understand."³⁰

Although Gillian remarks that "'Characters in fairy-tales' ... 'are subject to Fate and enact their fates'"³¹, which is ultimately death, she employs rewriting as a means of eluding it and making sense of her life and endow it with meaning. It is clear in the narrative that "although she was now redundant as a woman, being neither wife, mother nor mistress, she was by no means redundant as a narratologist but on the contrary, in demand everywhere."³² Her profession as a narratologist becomes the gist of her sense of reality since she defines herself with the words on the pages.

2.1.2. The Glass Motif and Story-Telling:

An important motif used in the novelette is the glass paperweights the djinn gives Gillian as a present just before he leaves her. In the other tales of the book and also in *Possession*, glass is used extensively to suggest the female protagonist's link with story-telling. We are reminded of the notion of art as a mirror reflecting the people passing by on a highway. Glass is like the tales Gillian listens to or the stories she tells. The stories are reshaped and what is confined in the narrative structure can be unearthed, just as glass reflects what hits it. Gillian's turning the paperweights in her hand is similar to the narrator's twisting the structure of a story. With the glass metaphor in the tale, it is then implied that a reworked tale is like a glass prism behind which the woman writer's creative skill is seen.

The reflective aspect of glass is found also in the mirror scenes of the narrative in which Gillian confronts with herself as a woman. Like the glass, the mirror in the bathroom shows us what goes on in the protagonist, the bathroom passage revealing Gillian's perception of herself and her fears. The bathroom where she faces her naked body confronts her with her utmost fears of aging and death and

³⁰Annegret Maack, "Wonder-Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", *Essays on The Fiction of A.S. Byatt, Imagining the Real*. Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble. London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 132.

³¹A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 258.

³²Ibid., p. 103.

being redundant as a woman. Behind the glass screen of the bath, she observes her body which she once thought to be "unexceptionable".³³ Glass is used as a medium very much like to a narrative through which the reader sees the protagonist's view of herself and how she positions herself in the world. Gillian's confrontation in the bathroom with the reality of aging and redundant womanhood now introduces into her life the idea of the transience of the body and she understands that in the past "its liveliness [. . .] had given her the lie".³⁴ All she sees in the mirror now is the vulnerability of the body against time. "And now it was all going, the eyelids had soft little folds, the edges of the lips were fuzzed, if she put on lipstick it ran in little threads into the surrounding skin".³⁵ Although it is not the first time she sees her body naked in the mirror, the awareness of her approaching death is even more unbearable since she is now troubled by the feeling of "floating redundant" as a woman/writer. Just as the glass is both "there and not there"³⁶, her body, while belonging to her, is not real either. Her sense of alienation from her own body creates a perception of it, and by extension of female identity, as something ambiguous. "But it didn't belong to me. I was tempted to - to love it - myself. It was lovely. But unreal. I mean, it was *there*, it was real enough, but I knew in my head it wouldn't stay - something would happen to it".³⁷

On the glass paperweight one can see the image of the sea which has both "a meshed and rolling geometrical" shape or feel the presence of a "a red and blue flame"³⁸ in the cold substance of glass. Maack relates these descriptions of contrast to the symbolic significance of glass in that the paperweights are "icons of the cyclic sequence of growth and decay, renewal and ending"³⁹ in the narrative. Glass has a two-fold meaning as it signifies both creation and annihilation. It is both transparent, revealing what is hidden inside it (like the glass nightingale hiding the djinn, the

³³Ibid., p. 189.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 242.

³⁸Ibid., p. 271.

³⁹Annegret Maak, "Wonder-Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", *Essays on The Fiction of A.S. Byatt, Imagining the Real*. Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble. London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 129.

glass coffin imprisoning the princess and the paperweights holding the colours within) and also the mysterious unveiling of what it hides. As a substance that can be molded into any shape, glass stands for the twists and turns in the narrative and the deviations from the conventional forms of narrating. In a narrative that rests a great deal on dualities, glass is an appropriate motif since it is "fire and ice, it is liquid and solid, it is there and not there"⁴⁰. It thus alludes to the absence-presence of women in society and Gillian's struggle to find her voice before her life-story is disrupted by death altogether.

2.1.3. The Use of Fairy Tales, Storytelling, and Sheherazade

The last chapter, which carries the name of the book as well, revolves around its protagonist's (Gillian's) rereading the tales of the past. The first four chapters, on the other hand, are rewritten tales themselves. Byatt's readers are familiar with "The Glass Coffin" and "Gode's Story" in *Possession* and they encounter these tales as the first two chapters of *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*. Gillian's compilation of stories throughout the narrative serves as a medium of creating tales of her own, enabling her to appear as both a protagonist and a narrator. In this respect, she is portrayed as the descendant of Sheherazade from *1001 Nights*, the ancestress of all female story-tellers. Both women depend on storytelling in their struggle with death that patriarchy will impose on them. Gillian hears Sheherazade's story from Orhan talking to her about the misogyny in tales. Sheherazade, "a woman of infinite resource and sagacity"⁴¹, escapes from the awaiting fate of death decreed by her husband King Shahriyar by telling him stories every night. In the same way, Gillian tries to free herself from her morbid fear of death in a patriarchal system by constructing stories of her own. As a reaction to the negative portrayals of women in literature as deceitful and disloyal exemplified in the conventional tale of King Shahriyar in *1001 Nights* and the tale of Patient Griselda, as well as the hostile attitude towards women writers that disregards female productivity and sees it as

⁴⁰A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 271.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 124.

threatening, storytelling stands out as a groundbreaking act for women writers going beyond the long-held prejudices against women in literature.

Orhan's account of the grim tale of the brothers Shahriyar and Shahzaman presents one example to the many stories in literary history with ill-refuted women characters. Sheherazade's talent of storytelling not only saves her life but also erases the harsh prejudice of men, represented by the King, against women. Shahrazad- as both the protagonist of the tale Orhan refers to in his speech and the narrator of the stories that delay her death - epitomizes the woman writer ascertaining her freedom through her generative power of storytelling. Naddaf observes that: "Shahrazad is characterized by nothing if not her fertility - both narrative and otherwise - and it is a tribute to her legacy of potentially infinite narrative generation that the text possesses an ability, indeed a willingness, to accommodate ultimately any tale between its ever-flexible borders, in the interest of maintaining narrative variety"⁴². The connection between storytelling and freedom is observable in Gillian's case, too. Just like Sheherazade's putting her death off by narrating a story a night to the King, Gillian compiles stories in order to construct a story of her own and fight off her dread of mortality.

Since the power to construct and narrate stories is a creative power, it is closely related to granting life, in both a real and literary sense, and it is the very reason behind the male dread of women and misogyny in literature. The fact that Sheherazade is saved from death by narrating stories for 1001 nights at the end of which she also gives birth to children points at the analogy between giving birth and creating stories, both acts exemplifying the life generating power of women. However, it is also this ability of giving life that has caused women like Sheherazade to be condemned. "Shahrazad has been considered - and refuted - to be a sister of the biblical Esther, while the opening story of the two kings Shahriyar and Shahzaman has been believed a variation of paradise lost and regained".⁴³ What brings

⁴²Sandra Naddaf, **Arabesque: Narrative Structures and the Aesthetics of Repetition in 1001 Nights**, Evanston, IL, Northwestern UP, 1991, p. 5.

⁴³Susanne Enderwitz, "Shahrazâd Is One of Us: Practical Narrative, Theoretical Discussion, and Feminist Discourse", **Marvels & Tales**, Vol. 18, No. 2, The Arabian Nights: Past and Present (2004), p. 188.

these women such as Sheherazade, Esther, Ishtar, and Eve together is the notorious perception of them as rebellious and deviant. Sheherazade's skill in storytelling and Ishtar's in her use of a persuasive language is attributed to a long tradition of female disobedience going far back to Eve's dismissal from the garden of Eden. Orhan narrating the tale of Sheherazade and King Shahriyar as well as Gillian narrating that of Patient Griselda narrate the same story of misogyny.

Maack, commenting on Gillian's use of fairy tales and myths, says that they constitute a "cultural memory" and prevent one from feeling at a loss: "Cultural memory establishes the mental and spiritual continuity in which Gillian participates when she accepts her own contingency and finitude."⁴⁴ Textual and cultural memory not only tells of women's vilification, but also of their resourcefulness and generative powers, as embodied in Sheherazade. The reader of the book realizes that Gillian's involvement with the tales of the past is not at all different from Sheherazade's insistence in telling tales. Myths and fictions, more generally stories, poems, and legends, all constitute a large web of interactions between generations and help the woman reader/writer get a sense of patterns underlying women's lives, victimization and revolt.

What Byatt does in the first four tales of the book - "The Glass Coffin", "Gode's Story", "The Story of the Eldest Princess", and "Dragons Breath" - and the title story is to interrogate the issue of freedom for women who seek to construct and narrate stories of their own. The narrative diversions from the conventional elements of fairy tales mark the release of the female voice from the constraints of patriarchy. In *The Disobedient Writer*, Nancy Walker argues that women writers first recognize these narrative constraints in traditional fairy tales and then reconstruct tales free from the dominance of a patriarchal literary tradition. She says: "Identifying patterns of thought and behavior with their fairy-tale equivalents is one way to resist the power of traditional plots. A second way is to change the story by rewriting it in

⁴⁴ Annegret Maack, "Wonder-Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", *Essays on The Fiction of A.S. Byatt, Imagining the Real*, Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 132.

one's own terms."⁴⁵The stories Gillian hears from the Ancient Mariner in the museum and the djinn become the source of the stories she will narrate as a narratologist. Throughout her quest, which starts with the end of her marriage and is governed by a sense of feeling redundant as a narratologist, the djinn acquires a critical role in changing the snake from a dark figure which represents the negative portrayals of women in patriarchal culture into a snake made of words. In a way, the djinn makes her rework her life, just like a text, and define her identity both as a woman and a narratologist. She confronts her past by telling about it to the djinn. It is significant that "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" shows a reciprocal relationship between the two narrators, one male (the djinn), although feminized by his imprisonment in a bottle, and the other female (Gillian) rather than the male being the narrator of all stories.

After narrating to her the tales of his previous female owners, the djinn asks her to tell him something that she has not told anyone else. As Gillian narrates her own story, she confronts the unspoken and thus unacknowledged parts of her life. The first thing she remembers is her bridesmaid experience. The night before the wedding when she bathed with her friend from the college whom she defines as "a woman of power, a woman of sexual experience"⁴⁶, she looks at her body for the first time in the mirror and feels terrified at its beauty. It is terrifying because it is seductive. These accounts of her also give the reader an idea about how women are perceived in Gillian's society in mid-twentieth century. Gillian makes it clear to the djinn that being defined as a woman of power is "unusual" in her day. Gillian's relation to her body is troubled even more by the sexual abuse she experiences the morning of the wedding. The father of the bride comes to her bed and harasses her sexually, which causes her to blame her body for the traumatic experience she has. Gillian's tendency to see her body as seductive and guilty after the bride's father admits that "I can't bear it"⁴⁷ reminds us of Judith Butler's analysis of Christian and Cartesian thought, which sees the body as a "profane void, the fallen state, . . . the

⁴⁵ Nancy A Walker, **The Disobedient Writer. Women and Narrative Tradition**, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995, p. 49.

⁴⁶ A.S. Byatt, **The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye**, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 237.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

eternal feminine"⁴⁸. What Gilbert and Gubar describe as a state of alienation to the self is, then, determined by feelings of guilt, sin, or transgression. The tales remind us that just as we can make sense of our life and existence "in the continuity of the tales"⁴⁹, we can also question this link to the past to free it from the stereotypes of and prejudiced notions about women. "The Eldest Princess", "The Glass Coffin", "Gode's Story", and "Dragon's Breath", which are among the intertexts in the novelette, have precisely this aim.

2.2. "The Eldest Princess"

In "The Eldest Princess", the dialogue between the old woman and the Eldest Princess reveals the role fairy tales have in the narrative of Byatt's work. The old woman explains their power to bring together the tales of the past and spin narrative threads themselves. She makes the princess aware of this power saying that "we collect stories and spin stories and mend what we can and investigate what we can't, and live quietly without striving to change the world".⁵⁰ Within a world of intertextual links, she rests her notion of freedom onto the ability to play with the existing tales and the consciousness of narrative links among them: "We have no story of our own here, we are free, as old women are free, who don't have to worry about princess or kingdoms, but dance alone and take an interest in the creatures".⁵¹ Gillian, who is about the old woman's age, too has this freedom. "The Eldest Princess" interrogates the issue of narrative freedom with its emphasis on the conscious interruptions of the protagonist - a Scheherazade-like figure - within the narrative. Byatt's female protagonist in the tale goes beyond the boundaries confining her by rejecting to comply with the traditional plot line of the tale itself. The life-stories of women can be changed and gender construction revised. The protagonist attempts to challenge and change the narrative requirements of traditional fairy tales.

⁴⁸Judith Butler. "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions", **Gender Trouble**, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 129.

⁴⁹A.S. Byatt, "Old Tales, New Forms", **On Histories and Stories, Selected Essays**, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p. 131.

⁵⁰A.S. Byatt, **The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye**, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 66.

⁵¹Ibid.

The protagonist of "The Eldest Princess" is the eldest daughter of a King and Queen and her dialogues with an old lady highlight the main concerns of the tale. Byatt chooses to incorporate many other fairy tales within the story and the eldest princess is given the role of a narrator gathering all these stories - together with her own - in the narration. The tale includes many motifs from traditional tales and it seems like the story of the princess is a frame tale sewn with pieces from other tales. The tale itself is set onto a quest, which is a conventional motif in tales, and the princess as the main character of the tale is sent on a quest by the King. The rule of necessity is constantly accentuated in the story, but it is this very necessity that the female protagonist will question and try to dismiss throughout her journey. All the other characters and the minor events serve the rule of necessity found in all traditional fairy tales. It says in the tale that:

"The witches and wizards on the whole favoured a Quest. One rather powerful and generally taciturn wizard, who had interfered very little, but always successfully, in affairs of State, came out of his cavern, and said that someone must be sent along the Road through the Forest across the Desert and into the Mountains, to fetch back the single silver bird and her nest of ash-branches."⁵²

The capitalization used to refer to the basic settings of the tale and the main event of the plot line - a Quest - emphasizes the significance of conventional elements of a tale. The fact that these elements appear in almost all tales also implies the notion of necessity ruling fairy tale tradition. In Byatt's tale, the eldest protagonist has the role to challenge this rule of necessity by acquiring the mission of a writer within the narration. What she does is basically to rewrite women's part in a fairy tale.

The eldest princess is a protagonist drawing the picture of an unconventional princess who is "by nature a reader, not a travelling princess".⁵³ She is described as an ardent reader knowing all about the princes and princesses in the tales. This extensive reading act of hers provides her with ample information about the patterns in the tales. She is well aware of the fact that the pattern decrees the eldest princess in the story fail in her Quest and be imprisoned as a punishment until she is rescued

⁵²Ibid., p. 44.

⁵³Ibid., p. 47.

by somebody, most probably a prince. As she is the eldest daughter of the family, she is doomed to fail in her Quest for the silver bird, which symbolizes art, and she knows that she has no control over this plot line. However, Byatt chooses to leave her protagonist with ways out that would free her from the necessities of the tale. The princess says: "She thought I am in a pattern I know, and I suspect I have no power to break it, and I am going to meet a test and fail it, and spend seven years as a stone".⁵⁴ Throughout her Quest, she meets the other minor characters of the tale, learns what way to follow, and experiences incidents on the way before she reaches the end, yet she does not feel content with her role in the tale, always remembering that she "*could* just walk out of this inconvenient story".⁵⁵ The reader always has the sense that the female protagonist of the tale is an unconventional eldest princess challenging the classical plot line and thus delaying the preordained end. Regarding the self-willed protagonist of the tale, Gilbert and Gubar argue:

"Having resisted and rejected the narrative closure of her fairy-tale identity, [she] arrives at the end of her story without achieving any closure at all. Instead, she finds a place where she can be both free and content, telling stories in the forest with the old woman and her creatures."⁵⁶

The eldest princess's resistance to the predestined end of the tale is an exemplification of the women storyteller/writer's desire to have a word, a say, of her own. This is also the central concern of "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" in that Gillian's desire to find and retell stories is not different from the Eldest Princess's wish to go beyond the stereotypes in the tale and construct a story of her own.

The creatures the eldest princess meets on her way and the Old Woman who hosts the princess in her house have symbolic functions in that they relate the story of the princess to many other fairy tales and establish a metafictional bond. Throughout her walk in the forest in search of the silver bird, the princess comes across various animals, each one of which has an ailment that needs a cure and she puts them in her

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 48.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁶Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 52.

basket and takes them to the Old Woman's house. The Old Woman acts like a timeless, wise healer by letting the creatures and the princess tell the story of their lives. The princess says:

"Old Woman put the creatures on the table, and healed them in her way. Her way was to make them tell the story of their hurts, and as they told, she applied ointments and drops with tiny feathery brushes and little bone pins."⁵⁷

She applies the same practice of healing to the princess and makes her experience what she has gone through once again. The fact that the princess feels purified and calm upon narrating her story implies that the Old Woman makes use of the healing power of words and storytelling. So is the princess: "And the Princess, telling the story, felt pure pleasure in getting it right, making it just so, finding the right word".⁵⁸ From the way she narrates her story, the old woman understands that she is under a "curse", a kind of addiction to reading and writing, and that storytelling heals her wounds. The eldest princess, then, shows an interest in reading her life as a text and rewriting it in her mind while narrating a tale. She also wishes to have control over the course of the incidents in the story. She knows that besides a character of a fairy tale, she also exists outside the tale, controlling the narrative. Jessica Tiffin calls this condition of the Eldest Princess as an "essentially postmodern realization"⁵⁹ of her role within the tale. The Old Woman's comment on the Eldest Princess's storytelling ability, in this respect, points at the feature Byatt associates with her protagonist. It is as if it were Byatt who says: "You had the sense to see you were caught in a story, and the sense to see that you could change it to another one".⁶⁰ The Old Woman explains to the princess the importance of having listened to the stories of others in order for her to write a story of her own. She likens writing stories to making tapestries with colours as both add to the liveliness of the world and make things seem different from as they always are. The dynamic structure of the stories is the very thing that gives the princess the sense of freedom.

⁵⁷A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 65.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Jessica Tiffin, "Ice, Glass, Snow: Fairy Tale as Art and Metafiction in the Art of A. S. Byatt", *Marvels & Tales*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2006), p. 50.

⁶⁰A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 66.

The story of the eldest princess does not have an end and with this aspect it resists the traditional plot line of conventional stories. The Old Woman narrates the eldest princess two stories, the first one being the story of the second princess and the second one being that of the third princess, so that the story of the eldest princess seems to come to an end. However, the Old Woman, by leaving it to the third princess to choose between "a magic glass" and a thread, leaves the story unfinished and signals that it is the decision of the eldest princess whether to end her story or not. Byatt gives the last word in the tale to the Old Woman, who brings the story to a temporary end saying "that is a good place to go to sleep, and stop telling stories until the morning, which will bring its own changes".⁶¹ This eluding of closure reinforces the idea that women's lives and discursive construction of gender identity can be changed.

2.3. "The Glass Coffin"

In "The Glass Coffin", the portrayal of the girl in the glass coffin opens the portrayal of women in fairy tales for discussion. Imprisoned like Snow White in the glass coffin and silenced by the magic of the "black artist", the female protagonist of the tale represents the silenced women in Western patriarchal culture. She lets the black artist in the house she shares with her brother and provides him with shelter from the bad weather. Yet, the same night, he comes into her room, enchants her with the music he plays, and expresses his wish to marry her. Indeed, it is even more than a wish since he makes it clear to her that the marriage will take place no matter what her answer is. The girl's initial response that she has no intention to marry brings about an unfavorable Fate and she is silenced by the black artist. The artist says to her "I have silenced you as surely as if I had cut out your tongue".⁶²

The silence of the female protagonist in the tale calls for a reconsideration of the place women have in the literary world. She states in the tale that when she opens

⁶¹Ibid., p. 72.

⁶²Ibid., p. 18.

her mouth to talk about anything in her daily life, such as the salt on the table or the bad weather, she can find the voice to talk; however, her tongue does not move and she remains speechless when she wants to inform her brother about the magic of the black artist. His magic is that of the patriarchal writer who stifles female voices. Her inability to talk is not different from Gillian's state of being stuck without words at the literary conference. The literally silent condition of the protagonists exemplifies the case that women are silenced or not heard when they want to talk/write about women's issues. The conventional plot line of the tale allows the narrator to point at the long-held silence of women in literature. This again takes the issue to the arguments about the male dread of women's creative abilities. Susan Gubar argues in "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity" that:

"Clearly this tradition excludes woman from the creation of culture, even as it reifies her as an artifact within culture. It is therefore particularly problematic for those women who want to appropriate the pen by becoming writers."⁶³

"The Glass Coffin", makes significant allusions to the patterns in the classical tale. As its male protagonist, it has a tailor concerned with his craft and the narrative is full of descriptions about his decorations. Stitching and sewing and imposing a shape on a piece of textile, the tailor, too, represents the writer creating a work of art. The tale does not end with the expected marriage of the tailor and the girl either, rather she continues to stay with her brother and the tailor decides to live with them "happily ever after".⁶⁴ The tale is also his story, the story of "a little tailor" travelling in a forest to find work. As he advances further and further, he gets tired and ultimately gets lost. The owner of the house he comes across on his way welcomes him in his house and offers him three gifts in return for his kindness, among which he chooses the 'glass key'. The key marks the onset of his adventure that will bring him to the glass coffin and the girl inside it

As in most conventional tales, the tailor sees a sleeping girl inside the glass coffin and the description of the girl is not different from that found in fairy tales:

⁶³Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

⁶⁴A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p.24.

"But then between the fronds he saw a face, the most beautiful face he could have dreamed of or imagined, a still white face, with long gold lashes on pale cheeks, and a perfect pale mouth".⁶⁵ In the confrontation scene of the tailor with the sleeping girl, she comments that this coincidence is the start of his adventure as it is the case in tales: "And he knew - it was always so, after all - that the true adventure was the release of this sleeper, who would then be his grateful bride".⁶⁶ The intervention of the narrator in the key moments of the tale disrupts the fairy tale conventions and makes the reader aware of the repeating patterns. In addition to these interventions of the narrator, the twists in the plot line from the conventional tale also exemplify the narrator's choice of freeing herself from the restrictions of the conventional narrative structure. The girl in the coffin mistakes the tailor for the Prince in the classical tale since he is the one who rescues her from the closed coffin. However, the tailor whom the narrator introduces to the reader as "our hero"⁶⁷ explains to her that he is not the Prince for whom she is waiting. In her article Jessica Tiffin suggests that the result of these interventions and twists is "a paradoxical awareness of fairy-tale structure and a tendency to examine and hence disrupt that structure, denying the authority of its narrator or narrators."⁶⁸

The tailor indeed questions his role in the tale as the rescuer and the prospective husband of the girl. Upon freeing her from the locked glass coffin, the tailor is offered her hand in marriage and the tale follows the classical plot line ending in marriage. However, the tailor expresses his confusion as to why he has to be offered to her just because he has rescued her from confinement:

"Of course I will have you,' said the little tailor, 'for you are my promised marvel, released with my vanished glass key, and I love you dearly already. Though why you should have me, simply because I opened the glass case, is less clear to me altogether,'"⁶⁹

⁶⁵Ibid, p. 14.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁸Jessica Tiffin, "Ice, Glass, Snow: Fairy Tale as Art and Metafiction in the Art of A. S. Byatt", *Marvels & Tales*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2006, p. 51.

⁶⁹A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 20.

The tailor questions the rule of necessity in fairy tales and such characterization in the tale indicates the critical stance of the narrator as well. Marriages are one of the basic closures in fairy tales as they suggest a happy end. The tailor attempts to avoid this closure and implies that a happy end is not necessarily preceded by marriage. Following this questioning of his place in the tale, the tailor also suggests that the girl think of her freedom and make her own decision about marrying him or not. He clearly expresses to her that "when, and if, you are restored to your rightful place, and your home and lands and people are again your own, I trust you will feel free to reconsider the matter, and remain, if you will, alone and unwed".⁷⁰ Much as the tailor is willing to avoid the constraints of the necessities in the tale, which Tiffin defines as "narrative predestination"⁷¹, he marries the girl and the tale ends with the conventional happy ending. Still, his critical attitude towards his role as the rescuer male protagonist of the tale reminds the readers of the possibility to question the stereotypes in tales.

The theme of imprisoning and silencing women in "The Glass Coffin" is also given through the glass imagery. The fact that the coffin that the woman in the tale is imprisoned in is made of glass suggests her confinement in literary stories and discursive constructions of womanhood. The glass coffin shows their antagonistic perception of women who seem to transgress the boundaries defined by patriarchal norms and are thus put to sleep. Gilbert and Gubar cites "Little Snow White" as a classical example of the tales portraying the female protagonist as either wicked or pure although both parties share the same fate of being imprisoned in an object made of glass. Gilbert and Gubar observe that "the conflict between these two women is fought out largely in the transparent enclosures into which . . . both have been locked: a magic looking glass, an enchanted and enchanting glass coffin"⁷². Byatt's rewriting of the tale draws the attention of the reader to the closures in traditional fairy tales and challenges the stock forms of narrative through her constant

⁷⁰Ibid., p.21.

⁷¹Ibid.,p. 51.

⁷²Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, "The Queen's Looking Glass", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p.36.

interruptions and distortions. She uses the glass imagery once again in the last tale of her book in order to dwell on the theme of the confinement of both the 'good' and 'wicked' woman.

2.4. "Gode's Story" & "Dragon's Breath"

The issue of confinement and liberation symbolized with the coffin in "The Glass Coffin" and the act of wandering in the forest in "The Eldest Princess" is also handled in two other tales which contain also allusions to significant texts of Western literature. Confinement within/by the patriarchy is highlighted in "Gode's Story", which is itself a reworking of Chaucer's *Patient Griselda* and Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. "Dragon's Breath" is set in a world that might well be defined, in Teresa Heffernan's words, as "apocalyptic". Defining apocalypse in her book *Post-Apocalyptic Culture* as a synonym of catastrophe, she also underlines that it is not without hope as it is "linked to the emergence of a better world, to revelation and disclosure".⁷³ Here, it might suggest once again the possibility of revising gender politics. "Dragon's Breath" revolves around a catastrophe troubling a town and the aftermath of the catastrophe is not bleak or obscure. The female protagonist of the tale, Eva, reappears in the end triumphant and the town is restored to its previous state of order and peace. Contrary to Eva's liberation from the boredom and dullness prevailing in the whole town, the Miller's daughter in "Gode's Story" cannot free herself from the world where she leads a *deadly* existence. In both "Gode's Story" and "The Dragon's Breath", death is used as a motif directing the actions of the characters. The way the female protagonists of the tales approach death reveals their view of life and how they define themselves as women.

In "Gode's Story", death appears as an apparition to the nameless daughter of the miller and later to the nameless sailor after her death. Focusing on the confinement of women in society by patriarchal norms, the story of the miller's daughter, who is not given a name in the tale, is constructed as a tale of madness.

⁷³Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture, Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth Century Novel*, Toronto, Buffalo, London, University of Toronto Press, 2008, p. 6.

Jane Campbell links the culturally induced madness of the female protagonist to the state of "the imprisonment of women by the code of chastity".⁷⁴ In her article analyzing the narrative power of women in Byatt's stories, "Gode's Story" is given as an example of the "stopped energies" of women Gillian underlines in the last story of the collection. "The miller's daughter, it seems - for the tale is filled with indirection and innuendo - is made pregnant by the sailor, and her child - murdered at birth or still-born? - appears as a "little thing dancing" that leads the mother over the edge of the cliff to her death".⁷⁵ The despair of the miller's daughter is revealed in the narrative by the passages describing her "bare feet" running after a "naked child". As a woman whose motherhood is rejected, she is not heard by the sailor and her pain is not understood. The little dancing girl is certainly also suggestive of artistic ambitions in the miller's daughter which she might have had to give up. The little thing that appears to her is read as a sign of her creative imagination and the sailor, with all his indifference, represents the patriarch that does not believe in the creative abilities of women. Death is left as the only escape for the miller's daughter running after the little thing which is "full of life".⁷⁶ Although the female protagonist dies in Byatt's tale, the little thing continues to haunt the sailor making him acknowledge its presence. Just before the sailor dies as well, he tells the other woman he marries that "In the end I waited longest, but now I hear it stamping, the little thing is impatient".⁷⁷"Gode's Story" highlights the creative potentials of the female, particularly revealing that this creative power is eventually recognized by the male. As Campbell also concludes, the story "demonstrates the power of women's imagination, for it is the miller's daughter who, by the force of her language, compels the sailor to see and hear the dancing child".⁷⁸ Hers is the language of her imagination whose liveliness is represented by the dance of the little thing. Music and literature appear as two dissident forces that let an individual go beyond the

⁷⁴Jane Campbell, "Forever possibilities. And impossibilities, of course: Women and Narrative in The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", **Essays on the Fiction of A.S. Byatt**. Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 136.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶A.S. Byatt, **The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye**, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 35.

⁷⁷Ibid, p. 38.

⁷⁸Jane Campbell, "Forever possibilities. And impossibilities, of course: Women and Narrative in The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", **Essays on the Fiction of A.S. Byatt**. Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 144.

boundaries set by social norms. The tale hides within itself the unheard music of the little dancing thing as well as the unheard cry of the miller's daughter. But creativity in women's case comes with a price, self-annihilation.

Death is used to refer both to the culmination of the protagonist's life and the possibility of the death of her imagination in "Dragon's Breath" as well. The story starting with the "once upon a time" formula follows fairy tale conventions closely. The village where the three protagonists live has a monotonous way of living since "life in that village repeated itself, generation after generation".⁷⁹ The villagers are haunted by a feeling of boredom until giant dragons invade them. The three protagonist, Harry, Jack, and Eva; however, is afraid more of boredom than the dragons. The female protagonist Eva, her name triggering biblical associations, makes rugs like many people in the town and she is in search of "unknown" colours to get rid of the stagnancy pervading the town. She is thus another rebellious female artist. The creative imagination of women is represented in the tale by the act of sewing rugs. Eva's mind is occupied with thoughts about the colours and shapes of the rugs she dreams of making:

"She could have woven in her sleep, she thought, and often did, waking to find her mind buzzing with repeats and variations, twisting threads and shifting warp and weft. She dreamed of unknown colours, purple, vermilion, turquoise and orange, colours of flowers and feathers, soft silks, sturdy cottons."⁸⁰

The analogy between the twisting dragon and the snake refers to the frightening nature of the creature and the dread serpentine women are believed to cast. In the village described in "The Dragon's Breath", "the circular impressions around certain hills are ascribed to the coiling grip of ancient dragons".⁸¹ Dragons are the main source of fear in the tales told to children at nights and their literal invasion of the village brings the regular and stagnant life to an end.

⁷⁹A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 76.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 78.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 75.

The female protagonist's search for variation is the indication of an inherent desire to create something novel and transcend the dullness of their ordinary lives. Trying something new disregarding and even defying what is conventional and ordinary will enable Eva to go beyond her identity as a weaver woman and become "a traveler, a sailor, a learned doctor, an opera singer".⁸² This variation in her dreams then is also the indication of the very possibilities writing provides. Throughout the writing process, the text presents its writer multiple options to construct the narrative. In "The Dragon's Breath", the boredom of the town stems from a definitive story that imposes a sense of obedience and order on the villagers. Regarding the juxtaposition between boredom and livelihood, Campbell argues that "[b]oredom and stagnation in an old plot . . . contrast the possibility of new stories".⁸³ The destruction caused by the dragons is welcomed by the people since it frees them from the sense of being entrapped into uniformity.

The tale avoids fairy tale conventions with its contradicting elements. The 'old women' found in almost all tales give insight into the basic features of the characters and the general plotline. Though they say that "dragons' breath paralyzed the will"⁸⁴, in Byatt's reworked tale, the destructive force of the dragons also has a transforming effect. After the devastation is removed and Harry is found again, the town is restored to life and new tales, which "were the opposite of boredom"⁸⁵ begin to be told. What the town experiences is a tale of "renewal"⁸⁶ that promises the rebirth of new tales. From the prospect of death and destruction come the potential for the creation of new lives through narration. As the end of the tale makes it clear, these new tales open the way towards a life that encompasses fear and joy, death and birth, destruction and reconstruction rather than being mundanely dull and unchanging: "And these tales, made from those people's wonder at their own

⁸²Ibid, p. 78.

⁸³Jane Campbell, "Forever possibilities. And impossibilities, of course: Women and Narrative in The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", *Essays on the Fiction of A.S. Byatt*, Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 138.

⁸⁴A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 85.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 92.

⁸⁶Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture. Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth Century Novel*, Toronto, Buffalo, London, University of Toronto Press, 2008, p. 11.

survival, became in time, charms against boredom for their children and grandchildren, riddling hints of the true relations between peace and beauty and terror".⁸⁷ These new tales also suggest alternatives to women's traditional stories.

The four tales that Byatt places before the title story all share the main concerns of "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" as they reveal that, for women, in particular, narrating one's own story without being entrapped in the patterns of traditional tales is an enlivening experience. In other words, women's storytelling releases them from confinement by defying narrative norms and giving the narrator a sense of freedom. In this respect, the four tales point at the necessity - on Gillian's part - to find her voice and ascertain her female identity. At the end of the four tales, the reader questions whether Gillian has achieved to do so and in the title story it becomes clear that the feeling of anxiety Gillian has as a female narrator reflects the difficulty to overcome the effects of misogyny imposed on women by a patriarchal system. Although the four intertextual tales present examples of how female storytelling challenges conventional forms of narration, Gillian's inability to speak at the conference and her literal paralysis indicate that the last tale of Byatt's book does not have an altogether promising ending.

In "The Story of the Eldest Princess", the eldest princess goes away from the traditional plot line by following a different road in the forest and disregarding the pattern she accepts she is in. By first listening to and then telling the stories of the creatures she has found on the way, she gains her "narrative freedom".⁸⁸ The princess in another story is rescued from the glass coffin she is imprisoned by the tailor, a male, but the story does not follow the classical marriage plot and diverts from the conventional plot line by excluding marriage as a necessity for a happy ending. The release of the princess from the glass coffin is not necessarily followed by a patriarchal imposition to marry. Here Byatt chooses to portray her protagonist as different from those in traditional fairy tales who are "inclined to immobilize

⁸⁷A.S. Byatt, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 92.

⁸⁸Jane Campbell, "Forever possibilities. And impossibilities, of course: Women and Narrative in The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", *Essays on the Fiction of A.S. Byatt*. Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 137.

themselves with suffocating tight-laces in the glass coffins of patriarchy"⁸⁹. In "Gode's Story", the unwillingness to comply with patriarchy continues. The death of the female protagonist, falling down the cliff while running after the little dancing thing, is not given as a sign of despair. Rather, it shows the persistence of the female, who suffers great pain inflicted on her by the patriarch, the sailor, to make her voice heard. She is not punished by death, as it is the case in moral tales, as a result of her affair with the sailor, which is devalued in society as immoral. The sailor does not lead a happy life with the other woman he marries either. "Gode's Story" underlines the very fact that though hearing the female voice disturbs the patriarch, it is no longer something that he can disregard. "Dragon's Breath", in this respect, ends with a reconciliation of the male and the female narrator since both Eva and Jack feel "delight and amazement" in the work they do. The story also diverts from the conventions in that "whereas the male hero of the traditional tales rescues the passive female from the dragon, here the sexes both share in helplessly witnessing the dragons' devastation and in creatively responding to it".⁹⁰ The last tale of the book interrogates the issues of narratology and freedom in a narrative that blends the realistic story of its protagonist with fairy tale elements. Campbell argues that Byatt's "collection ends with the woman free, active, and an interpreter of glass".⁹¹ The connection between the four tales and the title story is summarized as the woman narrator's coming to an awareness of her own internalized confinement, which has been imposed as the necessary outcome of being a woman in traditional fairy tales. The tale rejects closure and shows Gillian walking with the djinn into Madison Avenue in anticipation of new tales that may appear "at certain times when we are floating redundant".⁹²

⁸⁹Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, "The Queen's Looking Glass", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 44.

⁹⁰Jane Campbell, "Forever possibilities. And impossibilities, of course": Women and Narrative in The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", **Essays on the Fiction of A.S. Byatt**. Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 139.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 144.

⁹²A.S. Byatt, **The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye**, London, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 277.

CHAPTER III

The Children's Book: Narrating and the Fear of Mortality

Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2009, Byatt's *The Children's Book* revolves around the protagonist Olive Wellwood and her family at a place in the English countryside called Todefright between the years 1895 and 1919. This was a period during which not only the socialist ideals of Fabianism, but also of the early suffrage movement, under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst, influenced the society to a great extent. Like the Suffrage Movement, the Fabian movement addressed the role of women in society. Although she does not fully commit herself to these movements, Olive nevertheless responds to them, trying to define her place in her culture as a woman through her writing. Like Christabel LaMotte and Gillian, she also seeks to assert her name in the literary world by placing herself in both the dominant male literary tradition and the submerged female literary canon. She hosts meetings in her house that revolve mostly around discussions about the movements and emerging ideas of the time as well as literature. So the novel pictures her as a female writer amidst a politically and socially changing world, who attempts but fails to become the emancipated New Woman. She desires freedom but because of her past as a poor miner's daughter, she does not want to give up her present privileged position as the wife of a banker either.

Olive was brought up in a gold-mining town and is presently a thirty-eight year-old married woman and a mother of seven children. At a time when women came to a realization of their rights and needed a redefinition of their identities as individuals independent of their husbands or fathers, Olive is forced to reconsider her identity as a woman as well, but, as noted above, she is not fully committed to the ideals of the Suffrage and Fabian movements. For the suffragists of the time, it was both a daring as well as a challenging act to persuade the public to defy the long-held assumptions about the place of women in society. Olive willingly hosts no

suffragettes but Fabian socialists in her house who are also interested in the role of women in society. She rejects to take the whole responsibility of the household by sharing it with two other women, and chooses a career as a writer of children's literature. The fact on the one hand that the construction of her female identity is shaped by her writing act and on the other hand what she writes is influenced by male authorities such as her father and later her friend Prosper Cain as well as the 'female' gothic shows the in-between state she is found in. The feeling of distress Olive experiences stems from this very state of being torn between her experiences in the past and aspirations for the future. The need to be approved by a male authority, or the feeling of what Gilbert and Gubar name the anxiety of authorship and define as "the radical fear that she cannot create"¹ accompanies her writing and leaves her with an incomplete sense of identity.

Torn between her given roles as the responsible mother and wife and also the image of the New Woman whose voice started to be heard with the suffrage movement, Olive tries to express herself through the medium of writing. She does not want to confine herself to the role of the Victorian mother, avoids housework and domestic tasks, and comes to have a problematic relation to motherhood. The New Woman is represented, however, by Olive's daughters Hedda, a devoted member of the Suffrage Movement, and Dorothy, who realizes her childhood dream and becomes a doctor. On the one hand, it might be said that Olive has adopted the Fabian and Suffragettes' interest in the idea of the mothers of the nation who determine the future of the nation by instilling in children ethical values, as will be discussed in due course. However, she is not really interested in children other than the child in herself. Indeed, she questions the necessity of having children to write tales for children. She does not believe that "having children was necessarily helpful [since] it was enough to have been a child".²In fact, she feels that having children can

¹Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 49.

²A.S. Byatt, **The Children's Book**, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 183.

turn into an obstacle for writing since "children connected you to the earth, and therefore weighed you down, a little"³, which restricts her flights of imagination.

Olive's stories are seemingly devoted to her children, yet all mirror her own fears, anxieties, and desires as a woman caught in transition. Her writing allows her to earn money, "lay the golden egg"⁴ in the house, and support the family, but it does not help her to find her place in the new society, merely enabling her to escape into elfish fantasies. The only two intertexts which are actually integrated in *The Children's Book* are *The Shrubbery* story and *Tom Underground*. The one shows her persistent feeling of imprisonment, while the other reveals her fears and anxieties as a woman in a changing patriarchal culture.

3.1. Edwardian Culture: The Fabian Society, Suffrage Movement, and the Todefright Household

The political optimism of the pre-war 1900s found its expression in the ideals of the Fabian Society, which was established by a number of elites such as Bernard Shaw, Sydney Olivier, Graham Wallas, and May Webb in the United Kingdom⁵. Pointing out the fact that the current condition of the country called for reformist action, the Fabians demanded that the government contribute to social welfare by introducing new policies such as "free education, public housing, compulsory land purchase"⁶, and contributed to a new awareness of women's role in the family and society as agents producing a new pacifist and socialist generation. Delap draws attention to the fact that the Fabians' aim to create a more harmonious society governed by "a more responding, democratic government" went hand in hand with the prevalence of feminist movements, particularly feminist suffragism.⁷ The members of the group were mostly intellectuals from the academic or political world of the country. The Fabian Society in *The Children's Book* is represented by the

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 217.

⁵Margaret Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism*. Stanford University Press, 1961, p.7.

⁶Ibid., p. 14.

⁷Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.145.

Wellwood family and the guests in their house who have links with the community. Among these guests is, for example, Tartarinov Stepniak, who was an actual member of the Society. Although Olive is not seen in direct communication with him, or other guests, she is dismayed by his violent death on a railway line, “cut down by a train”⁸, which implies that the society’s utopia will not come true.

In his discussion of the Fabian Society, Delap observes that “The family was regarded as a key site of character development and altruism”⁹. Fabians in particular emphasized the role of women at home instilling in their children moral values such as pacifism and social equality, thus working for the wellbeing of not only the families but also of the entire nation. Olive appears to adopt this idea of women’s role when she thinks to herself that mothers should teach their children “tolerance, kindness, and self-reliance”¹⁰. She conceives of herself, and women in the society as the source of moral values. In this respect, it can be said that children’s books initiate them into the world of adults by teaching them morals and rearing them as proper men and women of the future of the nation. However, Olive’s writing does not really serve this aim, but her own initiation into the liberating world of fantasy.

The early twentieth century Fabian Society aimed at both giving women rights that would improve their lives as mothers and wives and making policies that would guarantee the well functioning of families, rather than emphasizing women’s “rightful heritage of political liberty and social and industrial freedom”¹¹. The roles of mother and wife thus continued to determine the definitions of female identity. Olive is affiliated with the Society as the wife of Humphry Wellwood, the son of a Quaker merchant, educated with the belief that he will be one of the leaders of the future. In *The Children’s Book*, the ideals of the Society and its links with feminism are given in the passages telling of public meetings and speeches about women’s rights. However, Olive “knitted through the meetings, head bowed, clicking her

⁸A.S. Byatt, *The Children’s Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 163.

⁹Ibid., p. 148.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 204.

¹¹Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, London, Vintage Classics, 2015, p. 327.

needles”,¹² which is suggestive of both disinterest and the close relation between her writing, knitting here functioning as a metaphor for narration, and Fabian ideals. Since the concerns of the Society were not limited to economics or politics but also encompassed concerns with the rights of women, Olive's relation to this circle to some extent influences her conception of being a woman. Her presence as host at the intellectual gatherings at Todefright and at once attendance of and mental absence at public meetings organized by the Fabians, however, indicate the conflict in her identity since she can belong neither to the intellectual circle of the Fabian Society nor does she want to belong to the domestic realm at Todefright.

The second significant movement that has an influence on Olive's view of herself as a woman and a writer is the suffrage movements of the mid-19th century. The period that the Fabian Society was an imminent influence on the British society also witnessed the development and spread of feminist ideas through the movement of the suffragettes. Demanding the rights mostly to vote and have an active role in both the family at home and in the political arena, the suffrage movement went beyond the national boundaries and had supporters from all over the world. Emmeline Pankhurst, who was at the same time a member of the Fabian Society, was a leading figure insisting that women be given the due respect and rights in society. She questioned the domestic role imposed on women as the caregivers in the house and drew attention to the fact that nobody in a girl's family cared about the education she received. She underlined that “A girl's education at that time seemed to have for its prime object the art of ‘making home attractive’ – presumably to migratory male relatives. It used to puzzle me to understand why I was under such a particular obligation to make home attractive to my brothers”.¹³ Although criticizing the traditional notion of women's role as “the nurturing mothers of men, their sisters, and uncomplaining helpmates”¹⁴, she nevertheless emphasizes the role of women as “the mother half of the human family”.¹⁵ Like the Fabians, she attributes great powers to

¹²A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 34.

¹³Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, London, Vintage Classics, 2015, p. 7.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. xiii.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

women as mothers, who care about the wellbeing of a whole nation and are ready to play an important part in social reform, which actually was to begin at home.

In *The Children's Book*, there are many passages relating the speeches of suffragists concerning women's education, their sexual freedom, and political participation, yet Olive attends none. The views of the Fabians regarding the role of women in society pictured women, however, mostly at home working for the wellbeing of their family, thus for their nation, since family was regarded as a social unit and good families were seen as the main constituent of ordered societies. In this respect, the early twentieth century views of the Fabian Society regarding the rights of women aimed at giving them the rights that would improve their lives as mothers and wives and making policies that would guarantee the well functioning of families, rather than emphasizing women's "rightful heritage of political liberty and social and industrial freedom".¹⁶ The roles of mother and wife continued to determine the definitions of woman identity. This family-oriented view is represented in the novel by the unnamed Colonel's wife, one of the anti-suffragist listeners at a public meeting called 'The Woman of the Future'. She objects that "The country was fighting a terrible war, in a distant country ... Let women guard the Home, and the values of the Home".¹⁷ She thus supports the Fabians' view of women's role in the private world which Delap relates as follows: women "were able, through the discourse of familial or 'civic maternalist' politics, to exert considerable influence upon the shaping of social policy in the early Edwardian years"¹⁸. Yet, the Colonel's wife acknowledges the truth in Miss Dace's remark that women working in the public domain, more specifically, as members of "the local government and Poor Law Boards"¹⁹ have made valuable contributions to the wellbeing of the nation. Suffragists within the movement not only promoted women's initiation into the political world, but also valued women's domestic role. The latter seemed to give them the power to produce ideal generations who would introduce laws and policies ensuring the participation of women in the political life.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 327.

¹⁷A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 292.

¹⁸Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.148.

¹⁹A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 292.

Many other speeches by women in *The Children's Book* highlight this positive change towards the recognition of women's participation in the political life and give an idea about the Fabian view of the Suffrage Movement. Mrs. Henrietta Skinner's speech called 'Women for Sale', for instance, reflects the Fabianist concern with the trade of virgin female children, prostitution, and venereal diseases. Marian Oakeshott's speech honours notable suffragists such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and underlines the importance of women's education. Rather than Olive, her niece Elsie is present as a listener in these speeches and tries hard to comprehend what she hears, that is the ignored rights of women. Many literary references in Oakeshott's speech - such as *The Mill on the Floss*, *Jane Eyre*, and *A Doll's House* - point out how women are subjected to a state of inferiority in a patriarchal culture that rejects their right to education, which they must struggle for. Elsie, on the other hand, is the prime example of blind devotion to a fate prescribed for her or excessive unwillingness to believe that this fate can be questioned and changed. She also "reflected sardonically that those hungry-minded women, those frustrated female thinkers, of whom Marian Oakeshott spoke, would always need her, Elsie, or someone like her, to carry coals and chop meat and mend clothing and do laundry, or they wouldn't keep alive".²⁰ What Elsie raises here is the question of female solidarity since the new opportunities that these "hungry-minded women" struggle for seem to require the self-sacrifice of other women. Olive is neither a radical suffragette nor a self-sacrificial woman.

Olive is not present at those meetings, nor has she any acquaintance with a Suffragette. The only connection she has with the movement is through the members of the Fabian Society she hosts at Todefright. Olive's writing is influenced by the conflict between the Fabian concern with motherhood and a more pressing need to go beyond its confines. She is aware of the Fabian emphasis on the family as the main sphere of womanhood, which is explicit in the comments of her friend Herbert Methley, a member of the Fabian Society and a writer of tales for children. He tells

²⁰Ibid., p. 297.

Olive that "the family must be of inestimable value when it came to writing tales for children".²¹ However, she does not find herself quite fitting into the domestic role of motherhood and housewife. Her distancing herself from motherhood and abhorrence of pregnancy suggest an analogy between not only writing and escape but also between writing and reconsidering her role as a woman/writer.

3.2. Olive Wellwood, Her Literary and Biological Ancestry

After her father's death, Olive, who is still an adolescent, begins to work as a housemaid to send money to Aunt Ada, who unwillingly looks after her upon her mother's death. Her future husband Humphry's lectures on literature, mainly by male writers, are a way of escape from both the dull routine of a housemaid's life and the harsh treatment of her aunt, beating her with a hairbrush. Resenting her aunt's decision not to send her to school to continue her education with the scholarship she won for her excellent performance as a pupil in secondary school and forcing her to send money back home, Olive gets fascinated with the world of literature. In due course she becomes a writer herself.

Olive's state as a writer is referred as being sunken. Tom frequently needs the company of his sisters "because Olive was sunken"²² in the stories she needs to complete. The idea of being sunken alludes to what Margaret Atwood refers to as the writer's traditional journey to the underworld.²³ She observes that the dead exist outside the limitations of time, hence in his/her conversation with them, the writer learns about his/her personal and his/her culture's past, present, and future. For the writer, this journey into the Underworld is more an introspective journey rather than a journey in its literal sense. In other words, it gives writers the opportunity to isolate themselves from the society and focus on their own thoughts and imagination. In terms of female anatomy, the underworld which is traditionally pictured as a dark deep cave, is associated with womb and therefore more closely with the female

²¹Ibid., p. 183.

²²Ibid., p. 472.

²³Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead. A Writer on Writing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 156.

writer. The metaphor of being sunken in a metaphorical cave thus refers to Olive's role as a woman writer.

The underworld in Olive's imagination or her notion of sunken state as a writer is the legacy of both the male and female literary tradition, the one being represented first of all by her father and the other by Gothic literature. The domination of and her interest in the male literary world cause in Olive the anxiety of authorship, as will be discussed in due course. The Gothic on the other hand was not only mainly written by women writers and for women readers, but it also deals with a collapsing world of repressed secrets in which dominantly female characters either get lost in a labyrinthian house or fall into dark places. The dark, frightening tales Olive mostly writes for children or rather the child in herself, as she says, are suggestive of both her poor childhood and her present life as a woman in an oppressive bourgeois marriage. The tales are set in dark obscure places, such as the underground and tunnels with which she is familiar from the stories told by her father.

The storyteller in the house during her childhood was her father Peter Grimwith, rather than her mother Lucy. As a draper's daughter who had always wanted to become a school teacher, Lucy Grimwith left Olive an intellectual inheritance. It was the father, however, who made Olive sit on his knee and told her tales. As a miner, his tales are mostly about the mines, providing Olive with the motif of the underworld. She listened to those tales with feelings of both fear and fascination.

Peter's tales create a gloomy picture of the underworld with its living creatures and the sense of fear it makes one feel. He returns from the mine with dusty clothes, dirty black hands, and broken fingernails, reflecting the hardships of working as a miner. The creatures in his tales are suggestive of the theme of death. In her discussion of the writer's journey into the underworld, Margaret Atwood observes that "all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear and a fascination with

mortality".²⁴ As a woman writer who witnessed many deaths, her mother's, father's, and brother's, Olive is driven by a fear of mortality and thus, like all writers, she desires to leave behind a work that will stand the test of time and thus become immortal. Again the fear of death provokes in her the desire to make sense of her life as a woman/writer. The yellow canary in one of her father's tales can, moreover, be read as the symbol of being caught up in the underworld and in her bourgeois existence, which imprisons her in the roles of wife and mother while the rats and the mice signify death and the subsequent fear of loss. The father "told her about the living creatures down there, the soft-nosed ponies who trundled tubs of coal along the tunnels, the mice and rats who whisked in and out of the ponies' nosebags, ate the miners' snap and chewed their candles, if they were not careful. He told her about the bright yellow canaries, trembling and hopping in their cages".²⁵ The trembling bird symbolizes the fear of not being able to fly and have its freedom again, as suggestive of Olive's desire for emancipation. The canaries in their cages are faced with the danger of suffocation due to the gases released from the coal. Olive also finds herself suffocated in her house at Todefright and her tales carry similar elements of darkness and death. The imprisoning atmosphere of Todefright is also evoked by the feeling of being "sunk and compacted into ancient mud"²⁶ found in Peter Grimwith's accounts of the mines. The stories she has constructed since her childhood - *Peter Piper*, *Tom Underground*, *People in the House in the House* - have characters, metaphorically imprisoned and seeking a way to escape.

The bird can also be read as an allusion to the Romantic tradition's portrayal of the writer as a bird. We might think for example of Shelley's *Ode to a Skylark* and *Ode to an Nightingale* and the bird alludes thus to Olive's aspiration to have her own voice as a woman writer. The motif of the bird in Romantic tradition is suggestive of the writer's imagination and the inspiration needed. The death of the yellow canary in the mine can be read as the underlying reason behind Olive's fear of not being able to write and finding her tales dull. Feeling the need of a story to have a sense of

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 84.

²⁶Ibid., p. 85.

completeness, she goes to Prosper Cain, who she sees as a guide for her imagination and writing. Saying that her "imagination is banal" and she needs his "precise knowledge"²⁷, Olive reveals the persistence of the male influence on the way she views her place in the literary world.

Besides her father, one other intellectual influence in Olive's life is her brother Petey, "a boy who wrote poems".²⁸ He is also one of those poor people who have dreams as a way of liberating themselves from the inevitable plight of poverty. He knows that he will have to go into the mine like his father and although knowing that he cannot do otherwise, he writes poetry as an act of rebellion. It is only to Olive that he reveals his fear of not being able to come out of the mine pit and dying there, asking her "what if I canna? What if I darena?"²⁹ Olive too visualizes herself going down the pit and screaming to go up. The pit in her life is nothing but Todefright and the desire to go up is suggestive of the need to write to escape its suffocating atmosphere.

While the tales she writes help her create a fictional world which helps her both distance herself from and confront the realities of the actual world she lives in, they also show the influence of two male figures - her father and brother - in her writing. This male influence that continues to shape her writing and thus her view of herself as a woman and a writer is also observed in her admiration of literary figures such as Shakespeare, Milton, and Bunyan as well as the need to be approved by her male guests whom she calls as "leaders of culture"³⁰ such as Prosper Cain and August Steyning. Her first encounter with her husband, Humphry Wellwood, is during one of his literature lectures. There Olive hears the "rhythms of Shakespeare and Swift, Milton and Bunyan, which she thought she had craved all her life without knowing it".³¹ She finds herself fascinated with the works of the male literary tradition.

²⁷Ibid., p. 11.

²⁸Ibid., p. 86.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., p. 55.

³¹Ibid., p. 90.

That her womanhood is, in her younger years, defined by her profession as a housemaid and that the literary figures she is influenced by are male like her father account for the lack of confidence she has in defining her identity as a woman/writer. Olive's constant need for praise and approval, in particular Prosper Cain, and dissatisfaction with what she writes are all indications of the anxiety of authorship she feels as a woman writer. In their article "Milton's Bogey: Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers", Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar points at the patriarch as the reason behind women writer's disbelief in themselves. They argue that "it was only through patriarchal poetry that they learned - . . . to define themselves as misogynistic theology defined them - most of these writers read Milton with painful absorption"³². In Olive's case, reading Milton – or listening to her father, brother, or Prosper Cain - on the one hand inevitably determines how she places herself in the literary world carrying a feeling of inferiority to the male. On the other hand, it also causes a sort of imprisonment within a patriarchal literary tradition, which relegates women to domestic roles, since she is quite aware that it is an age of transition from long held convictions to new ideas about the place of women in culture. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*³³, women are portrayed as evil and associated with Sin. John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*³⁴, in which women characters do not have significance, was followed by a sequel which depicted the religious journey of Pilgrim's wife Christiana, her children, and others. However, the sequel focusing on a female protagonist caused little interest in the literary world. In her father's tales, women do not figure. Yet, the time Olive is writing in witnesses many sweeping changes regarding the role of women in social and political life. The male influence as well as the influence of these changes is both observed in Olive's writing and she appears as a woman trying to adopt the new ideas of the time.

In fact, one of the stage performances at Todefright, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the form of a tableaux, suggests that change is possible. The similarity

³²Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, "Milton's Bogey: Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers", **The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 189.

³³John Milton, **Paradise Lost**. Oxford University Press, 2004.

³⁴John Bunyan, **The Pilgrim's Progress**, UK, Penguin Classics, 2008.

between *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Olive's writing suggests a reading of Olive's life at Todefricht at the end of the 19th century on the verge of transition caused by the Fabian and Suffrage Movement. Olive's life has already changed from working as a housemaid to adopting the profession of a writer of children's literature. And as Shakespeare's play suggests, transformation is once again possible.

Midsummer's Night Dream bears many instances of identity change through the use of masks, charms, and magic. In the play-within-the-play, Olive acts the fairy queen Titania and gets enchanted by the juice poured on her eyelids, so that her frame of mind changes and she falls in love with the ass played by Bottom. There is the possibility of change in both Olive and her society as well, as also suggested in the following incident. Just after the fairy king and fairy queen - Humphry and Olive - give their royal speech to the public, Hedda enters the garden crying as there has started a fire in the lawn. However, Olive tries to soothe her daughter saying that the fire is just "a magical midsummer bonfire".³⁵ And, with the puppet master's song, everybody starts to jump over the fire, which appears to symbolize both an end and a new beginning. The optimism and the pervasive joy at the party are indications of the firm belief of the Fabian socialists in a better future and a more equal society. That Olive is writing at a time of social change also influences her view of herself as a woman. The journey Olive takes is similar to that of the society in that they are undergoing a change. Part II of *Pilgrim's Progress* by the above mentioned Bunyan reinforces the idea of a woman and a society in search of a new identity. In this book, Pilgrim's wife and others set out for the Celestial City. Like the Fabians, the Suffragettes, and Olive, Christiana envisions a utopian world. Despite suffering from the anxiety of authorship and continuing to act out the roles of wife and mother, Olive is, on the other hand, aware of her potentials as a writer and it is the gothic, a part of "escapist fiction"³⁶, that helps her confront a disintegrating fossilized patriarchal system and her desire for emancipation.

³⁵A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 65.

³⁶Norman N. Holland & Leona F. Sherman, "Gothic Possibilities", *Gender and Reading: Essays On Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1986.

3.3. Olive and the Gothic:

Despite the influence of the male literary tradition and the subsequent feeling of being sunken, Olive has an unbound imagination, which finds its expression in elements of the 'female' gothic in her writing. Ellen Moers defines the Gothic as a mode of writing which aims at scaring people. "In Gothic writings", she argues, "fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite auctorial intent: to scare."³⁷ Talking to Prosper Cain about her motives behind her gothic writing, she too emphasizes the strange, the supernatural, and the sensation of fear which she feels herself and desires to make her readers feel. Mentioning the child in her, she says: "I think the persisting child in myself inhabits Elfland - not pretty gauzy Fairyland but a more dangerous and wilder place altogether. I like watching invisible beings and strange creatures who creep into the real world from *elsewhere*, so to speak".³⁸ Olive's writing is driven by feelings of fear caused by the idea of being imprisoned in a bourgeois way of life, which, at Todefright, is actually disintegrating, and more specifically in the roles of wife and mother. Indeed, the idea of childbirth, which often in Olive's time resulted in death, increases her fear of these roles. These anxieties are more easily brought to the fore in a gothic world, which moreover, seems to promise women unbound liberty, both intellectual and sexual. However, in traditional society's eyes, liberated women are seen as scary creatures and hence again relegated to the gothic world. On the other hand, motherhood is also seen as a source of inspiration for some women writers, who, like Olive, liken literary creativity to biological reproduction, again in Gothic terms.

Olive tells Prosper Cain also that "I would like to write the *Morte d'Arthur* or *Goblin Market*".³⁹ While *Morte d'Arthur* has its gothic moments, Christina Rossetti's *The Goblin Market* is more overtly gothic throughout. Rossetti's existence as a

³⁷Ellen Moers, "The Female Gothic", **Gothic: Eighteenth-century Gothic : Radcliffe, reader, writer, romancer**, 2004, p. 123.

³⁸A.S. Byatt, **The Children's Book**, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 153.

³⁹Ibid.

reclusive woman and writer, “looking at life through the worm-holes in a shroud”⁴⁰ is itself very gothic as well. In her long poem, two sisters, Laura and Lizzie, cannot resist the temptations of goblin men who insist:

“Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come, buy,
Come, buy.”⁴¹

So the goblin men seek to tempt the sisters to eat the fruit they sell. The poem is suggestive of the Biblical story of Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit and tempting Adam to do so as well. A woman reader like Olive would interpret the story as the rebellious act of a woman committed in order to free herself from a male dominated culture. It might indeed suggest her desire to liberate herself from the father figures in her life beginning with the ultimate father, the God so that she can overcome her anxiety of authorship. There are also sexual implications since eating the fruit can be read as learning the enchanting mystery of forbidden sensuality. Both the New Woman and the transgressing female protagonist of the gothic try to liberate not only their minds but also their sexuality. Olive indeed has an illicit relationship with several men, among them Herbert Methley, who lectures on the role of the New Woman in society. In the Bible, sexual emancipation is linked with intellectual awakening. Ellen Moers claims in her article "Female Gothic" that the fantasy world of *The Goblin Market* is a way out from the strict Victorian world its writer grew up in. It was a realm to which "Christina Rossetti had access through fantasies derived from the night side of the Victorian nursery"⁴², which associates sexual emancipation with intellectual growth. Olive's desire to write *The Goblin Market* can thus be read as the reflection of a similar desire to escape from a collapsing bourgeois order at Todefright characterized by illicit relationships and mutual unfaithfulness, and to realize her intellectual awakening.

⁴⁰Margaret Atwood, **Negotiating with the Dead. A Writer on Writing**. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 89.

⁴¹Christina Rossetti, **The Works of Christina Rossetti**, Wordsworth Editions, 1995, p.13.

⁴²Ellen Moers, “The Female Gothic”, **Gothic: Eighteenth-century Gothic : Radcliffe, reader, writer, romancer**, 2004, p. 137.

The gothic elements found in Olive's tales also reflect the fear of childbirth and motherhood. The conventional understanding of motherhood is a reality which makes Todefright a place she desires to escape from since she cannot quite fit into the role of the mother idealized by the Fabian society as the one teaching children morality. Her escape into the world of fantasy shows her distance to motherhood and its burdens, and the elfish world she peoples with supernatural characters is the realm where she feels the most free. She is most at unease when she is pregnant and it is during those times of distress that dark thoughts come into her mind, reflections of which are seen in her tales:

"She felt a movement of nausea as she bit into the toast, which the sugar of honey alleviated. An unbidden image of the unborn child inside her came into her mind, something coiled in a caul and attached, like a puppet, by a long thread to her own life [...] She feared for [her children], and their presence disturbed her peace."⁴³

Olive moves from the sensation of physical nausea to psychological and mental distress. Her abhorrence of the unborn child can be linked to the fear of childbirth, which was quite common at the time and is reinforced in Olive's case by the memory of her mother's death after giving birth to Olive's brother.

The fear of childbirth and death is a repeating theme in female gothic writing, and the woman writer gives birth to a world of fantasy in order to come to terms with this pervasive fear. The passages that picture Olive as an anxious pregnant woman use the blood motif to underline the relation of birth to death:

"She arched herself, howled and bore down. . .Blood and water were everywhere. Olive felt it well out."⁴⁴

Death is like a potent idea in her mind which is reinforced frequently by the news she hears, stories she reads, or people she knows as well as the memory of her father and brother killed in the mine. During one of her pregnancies, she learns about Stepniak's death from another friend of hers and the fear of hearing about the death of

⁴³A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 83.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 166.

somebody in her own family soon captivates her mind. It is said in the novel that "Tartarinov's vivid imaginings of Stepniak's torn body reminded her soon, soon she would herself face pain, and possible death, of one, or two people".⁴⁵ She then fears labor as a physical predicament that will tear her body apart for the baby to be delivered into the world. This thought provokes in her the fear of pregnancy and motherhood as a deadly experience.

Olive also suffers from what is today known as post-natal depression. In the Rodin Pavilion she goes with August Steyning and her husband, she looks at bronze works of Rodin and spends some time in front of the Gate of Hell. There she comes across the figure of an old woman that awakens her dormant fear of aging and dying:

"Olive was grimly appalled by the figure of an old woman – a very old woman – rising or falling along the left pillar, with every detail of her fallen flesh remorselessly and lovingly recorded – flat, flaccid breasts, withered thighs, hanging bag of a belly. a dead child trampled her head, another pressed its face into her stomach."⁴⁶

What we are presented with is the figure of a mother who is agonized by the demands of her children on her person. Among the writers of the gothic tradition, Moers points at Mary Shelley, her painful motherhood, and her writing *Frankenstein* as a "birth myth"⁴⁷, which is not different from what Olive experiences and articulates in her gothic fiction. She suggests reading *Frankenstein* as an account of the afterbirth revealing the pathos and depression caused by being faced with a newly born being completely dependent on the mother. Moers argues:

"*Frankenstein* seems to be distinctly a woman's mythmaking on the subject of birth precisely because its emphasis is not upon what precedes birth, not upon birth itself, but upon what follows birth: the trauma of the afterbirth. Fear and guilt, depression and anxiety are commonplace reactions to the birth of a baby, and well within the normal range of experience."⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 163.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 271.

⁴⁷Ellen Moers, "The Female Gothic", **Gothic: Eighteenth-century Gothic : Radcliffe, reader, writer, romancer**, p. 125.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 126.

What Shelley underlines as the destructive aspect of motherhood is also seen in Byatt's portrayal of her protagonist and her view of motherhood. Olive associates the newly born baby with an unknown and a dark future. She feels that the baby inside her leads her to a dark life where she cannot place herself and establish a life of her own. The baby itself is "the blind life she had not exactly invited to settle in her"⁴⁹, like a parasite. Motherhood is furthermore associated with female writing. First of all, the writer, actually irrespective of gender, is traditionally likened to a pregnant woman and his/her works to children. The blood that is supposed to nourish the fetus and the blood mingled with the afterbirth is frequently linked with writing or again pen and blood are often paired to account more specifically for women writers' attempt to place themselves in the literary world. The blood here identifies women's act of writing as a transgression which is divinely punished. The hardships of pregnancy, labor, and childbirth emblemized in the image of blood are ordained by God as punishment for Eve's rebellion. Hence, the association of the act of writing with blood alludes to it as a transgressive act. Gilbert and Gubar argue that the pain of birth, which culminates in blood and represents "death's necessary opposite and mirror image"⁵⁰, is the outcome of the woman's - that is Eve's - defying the restrictions and eating the forbidden fruit. Punishing women for what is seen as an act of transgression reinforces the idea of their inferiority to men and is a denial of their right to define themselves as anything but a mother. Writing is, then, a rebellious and a painful act for the woman writer.

In *The Children's Book*, Olive's writing is thus a rebellious act of self-creation as a writer, which is associated with bleeding: "She took up her pen and began writing, on a new sheet. Blood flowed from heart to head, and into the happy fingertips, bypassing the greedy inner sleeper".⁵¹ The blood that is supposed to feed the fetus instead feeds the female writer's intellect and the hand that holds the pen. What we are presented with is then no longer motherhood in its conventional sense

⁴⁹A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 83.

⁵⁰Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: "Milton's Bogey: Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers"*, *The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 197.

⁵¹A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 143.

but a female writer's self-begetting and potential authoring of works of literature. The "greedy inner sleeper" demanding to be fed is thus perceived as an obstacle to female writing, however, she cannot complete the act of forging for herself the identity of an emancipated woman writer since, in the tales that are interpolated in the novel, most of her protagonists are male. The protagonists in the tales she writes for her daughters are female but they are not included in the narrative.

The two stories inserted in the narrative – *The Shrubbery* and *Tom Underground* – give us insight into Olive's discontent with the traditional roles of wife and mother as well as her failure to adopt the identity of the New Woman and woman writer. Through the stories' relation to the gothic tradition, Olive's disturbed relationship with her mother and children is revealed. In *The Shrubbery* is a rewriting of actual *Mother Goose* stories written in the 17th century for children. In the story, Olive apparently puts herself in the place of a devoted mother but her secret discontent with this role is revealed by the problematic relationship between mother and son, which results in a quarrel and his escape into the Underworld. In *Tom Underground*, which is a much more overtly gothic fiction, it is Olive's desire to escape from a confining world to the Underworld that we are presented with through the mysterious disappearance of the protagonist.

3.3.1. A Mother Goose Story - *The Shrubbery*

The seemingly conventional tale inserted in *The Children's Book* with the title *The Shrubbery* foreshadows Tom's death and Olive's remorse through the disappearance of its child character Pig/Perkin and the grief of his mother, Mother Goose. The story exemplifies Olive's interest in gothic elements, which here stress the problematic mother-child relationship, which results in the son's death. In the story, Mother Goose is seemingly described as a warm, loving mother trying to get by with her many children when her husband goes on a long sea journey leaving his family without news of him. Unlike Olive, she devotes herself to her domestic role, cooking nourishing meals made with inexpensive ingredients and making clothes out

of old materials. Like Olive, she also tells her children stories and prepares a present for each one of them to be opened on their birthday. Among all her children, Pig is the most naughty one, doing things as he pleases and troubling his mother most of the time. The day when he is playing with marbles in the kitchen, he causes her to step on the rolling marbles and fall, hitting her head on the leg of the table. Out of pain and anger, she tells him to leave the kitchen and never come back home. Pig goes into the shrubbery; realizing the existence of a small hole in the ground, he looks in and gets fascinated with what he sees inside, little people with gold and silver hair who are dancing. His wish to enter their world is welcomed by these people. Eating the fernseed and getting smaller and shrinking into a tiny man, he joins their company, not knowing that he can never come back to the world above. Realizing that her son has not been at home for some time, Mother Goose goes to the shrubbery to look for him and, to her dismay and surprise, finds him in the hole she looks into. She wants him to leave the gold and silver people there and return home, yet learns that her wish for him to never come back to the house has been heard and made come true. "She said 'Come home.' He replied that she had told him not to. 'You know I didn't mean it,' she said. 'Words have their own life,' said Huron"⁵², king of the little people.

The story of Mother Goose and Pig can be read as a parallel intertext within the story of Olive and Tom since both mothers fail to realize the disastrous effects of their words on their sons. What is ironic in their case is that both women are described as mothers trying hard to please their children with the tales they construct for them, yet ending up losing them. Olive's identification with Mother Goose is established by their common role as troubled mothers, storytellers, and experience with poverty and fear of loss. Moreover, Mother Goose's creating new clothes out of old fabric with the purpose of saving money is not different from Olive's creating stories for children in order to support her family financially. Trying to preserve the welfare of their families, both women make up things specifically designed for their children. As for the similarity between Tom and Pig, both are dissatisfied with the

⁵²A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 102.

life at home, as ruled over by their mothers, and desire to escape into another world altogether. Pig's marbles and pebbles are also reminiscent of Tom's fascination with stones. Mother Goose's discontent with her role as mother and Pig's problematic relationship with her are then reflective of Olive and Tom's relationship as well as state of mind.

Olive feels she has to continue writing since "Todefright's continuance depended on it".⁵³ In other words she is the breadwinner in the family, her husband contributing practically nothing to the household finances. It is the money earned through her writing that keeps the life in the house at Todefright going. So while Mother Goose appears to represent the domestic role of women, her name actually alludes to Olive's career as a writer whose writing, as noted above, represents an act that transgresses the order rooted in a conventional gender politics. We might say that nothing in the story is as it appears. While Mother Goose is, similar to Olive, troubled with an absent husband who makes no financial contribution, but, unlike her, immersed in household chores, she too apparently considers her existence in the domestic realm as oppressive. This results in a conflict-laden relationship with her son Pig. While she is making pastry in the kitchen, he is playing with his marbles, which made as they are of transparent and reflective glass invite the idea of art. What we are then presented with is a woman doomed to demonstrate her creativity only in the form of cooking in the kitchen, while her son, the male, enjoys the prerogative of being exempt from work and thus free to indulge in play, which is closely associated with the play of imagination and hence art. Her anger is then not merely aroused by her son's playing with marbles in the kitchen, but by her exclusion from what he enjoys, that is, artistic freedom. She indeed is perceived by her son, who fears that she will beat him as "a wild witch"⁵⁴, that is a supernatural gothic creature who is out of place in an idyllic domestic world.

Mother Goose articulates the anger and frustration experienced by Olive, who, as noted above, feels that her children are obstacles to her life as a writer.

⁵³Ibid., p. 142.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 98.

Though Tom seems to be her favorite child, they too have a problematic relationship, which is seen in Tom's liberty to leave the house and play outside as well as Olive's envy of her son's access to educational opportunities, which were, despite her scholarship, denied to her, the daughter of a poor miner. Unlike her, Tom can leave suffocating Todefright, which he does only to both discover that there is no place for him in a cruel world in which people determine how he will live his life and to meet his untimely death. He escapes to the forest and there plays with tree branches carving them into certain shapes, as suggestive of his artistic talent. He is first mysteriously lost and then found in the forest lying dead on the ground. Pig too leaves his home to escape his mother's fury finding himself in the supernatural world of tiny people. Here he joins their singing and dancing, both artistic activities. His mother, on the other hand, catches merely a glimpse of this world of art when looking through the hole in the ground and must return to her domestic life with its troublesome chores. Olive thus articulates in *The Shrubbery* her dissatisfaction with her present domestic life and desires to escape into a world of art, which is in the story, however, made for the male child. As noted above, Atwood refers to the writers' traditional descend to the underworld. She observes that:

“All writers learn from the dead. As long as you continue to write, you continue to explore the work of writers who have preceded you; you also feel judged and held to account by them.”⁵⁵

Mother Goose cannot find such an opportunity to explore this world of the underground as a writer and thus feels judged by people, possibly also by the generation of writers before her, for supposedly not achieving artistic expression.

The implications of Mother Goose's obsession with order in the house can also be observed in Olive's enthusiasm in organizing parties that would show the Wellwood family living in harmony at Todefright. While Olive guarantees the order in the house with her role as the mother of seven children, her role as a writer supports the family financially. Even at those times of glamorous parties and

⁵⁵Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead. A Writer on Writing*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 178.

productive writing, she cannot get over the fear of losing, which shapes what she writes to a great extent. "There was always the risk of a little more than distraction . . . a threat to the safe house".⁵⁶ Olive's stance as a writer shows that she knows words have a life of their own and believes that through what she writes, she creates a new world that could cover the deficiencies of the actual world they live in.

Through Olive's writing, Byatt exhibits the intrinsic link of writing with the fear of loss, the feeling of grief, and the desire to give life in order to conquer these negative feelings. At those particular times of pregnancy, she feels the most helpless against the pressing fear of loss signaling one of the many juxtapositions the book rests on. Prior to that climactic moment of giving birth, she carries the fear of causing one's death and this coexistence of contrasting feelings constitutes the framework of her writing:

"She thought briefly about the coming birth, the blood that would flood, the pain that would gripe, the possibility that the emerging stranger on the flood of blood would be mottled, waxy and inert, a tight-lidded doll, like Rosy. She knew about amniotic fluid - the unborn creature did not *really* float in blood - but blood went to it, her blood, down a livid rope that could give life, or could strangle."⁵⁷

The relation between giving birth, blood, and writing here, as noted above, illustrates that writing, just like giving birth, is a painful process that is also followed by the ecstasy of giving life. The baby prince in the tale she writes during her pregnancy grows with the baby inside her, making her feel both the strength and the pain of motherhood and writing simultaneously.

Discussing the cultural receptions of female creativity in her article called "The Blank Page and The Issues of Female Creativity", Susan Gubar examines female writing by using a story called "Blank Page" by Isak Dinesen as an example since the text presents certain implications of blood regarding female creativity. "Blank Page" is a short story that is mainly about a rebelling nun in Carmelite order. After their wedding night, the nuns are expected to show a linen stained by their

⁵⁶A.S. Byatt, **The Children's Book**, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 142.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 142.

blood, which symbolizes virgin honour. One of the nuns display a white linen, without any blood on it, thus leaving the framed canvas without a story. Gubar argues that there are two points that could be shown in terms of female creativity and blood: The first premise is that woman body is seen as a "medium" of art, enabling women to engage themselves in artistic experience. The second premise, on the other hand, makes a cultural reading of female creativity through the blood metaphor. Gubar suggests that "one of the primary and most resonant metaphors provided by the female body is blood, and cultural forms of creativity are often experienced as a painful wounding".⁵⁸ The implication of the story - that writing is strongly related to bleeding - is also found in the narrator's conceptualizing Olive's writing act. The blank sheet of the Clamentine nun is not different from the blank sheet on the desk of the pregnant writer in Byatt's narrative. "She took up her pen and began writing, on a new sheet. Blood flowed from heart to head, and into the happy fingertips".⁵⁹ Much as it is a painful act, writing is at the same time glorified through the analogy with blood. Gubar points out that bleeding in "The Blank Page" story symbolizes chastity and purity, thus it is given a positive connotation. On the other hand; however, it signifies the expectation that woman serve the marriage institution by producing offspring. The significant aspect of this self-sacrificing act is that female creativity becomes possible through the sacrifice of the body. In Olive's case, bleeding is associated with not the prospect but the act of giving birth. That Olive writes stories out of her labor pains and later for each one of her children shows that female creativity is thought together with motherhood in *The Children's Book*. When Tom is lost for several days and while she is going to Prosper Cain's house in London for help, she rewrites motherhood in her mind and acts it. "She knew that Cain found this motherly concern attractive; she created, deliberately, a feeling of warmth and helplessness".⁶⁰ In Dinesen's story, the woman is contended that she sacrifices her body for the sake of creating the framed plate with the blooded sheet. Olive's bleeding related to giving birth to her child is connected in her mind with the pains of writing. Thus, her need to be acclaimed as a caring mother can be interpreted as the

⁵⁸Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 2, **Writing and Sexual Difference**, Winter, 1981, p. 254.

⁵⁹A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 143.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 235.

prerequisite of her being approved as a successful writer of children's literature in patriarchal culture. As long as she is seen as a proper mother, her writing career is credited.

3.3.2. *Tom Underground*

Olive writes stories for each one of her children and *Tom Underground* is the one she writes for her favorite child, Tom, renamed in the story Lancelin. The narrator in *The Children's Book* asserts about Olive's writing that as a writer, she "imagined male characters and male creatures"⁶¹ mainly and points at Lancelin and his lost shadow as examples. Yet, with his withdrawn existence at home and his frequent disappearance at his own will, Tom/Lancelin represents Olive's defiant alter ego that she usually suppresses, only to release in her writing. Lancelin's "flawlessly beautiful"⁶² face, which feminizes him, and the fact that the playwright August Steyning chooses a woman to act in the role of Tom/Lancelin in the story's stage adaptation also support the assumption that the male protagonist is Olive herself. Lancelin is moreover a derivative of Lancelot, which is the name of a famous knight in Arthurian legends. Although a knight of King Arthur's court, Lancelot is more loyal, indeed in love with the queen Guinevere. His masculine role is thus undermined by his romantic disposition, which leads him to suffer great pain when frustrated in love. It is thus also through his affinity with Lancelot that Lancelin is feminized. In this respect, the story picturing Tom in the underground reflects Olive's deeply hidden desires and uncertainties about herself.

Quite similar to the double existence of fiction and reality or magic and terror in *The Children's Book*, *Tom Underground*, a story which is about Tom and his shadow, then, points at the presence of double identities – that of housewife/mother and of New Woman/writer – in the portrayal of the novel's female protagonist. In her discussion of the writer's doubleness, Atwood speaks of "the person who exists when no writing is going forward – the one who walks the dog, eats bran for regularity,

⁶¹Ibid., p. 519.

⁶²Ibid., p. 143.

takes the car in to be washed [...] and that other, more shadowy and altogether more equivocal personage who shares the same body and who, when no one is looking, takes it over and uses it to commit the actual writing”.⁶³ Her writer persona is closely intertwined with the New Woman in Olive, who is yet to be formed. Indeed, Lancelin’s shadow is stolen by a black rat, which represents a phallic symbol and hence the patriarchal bourgeois society, poverty, and death.

The story portrays, as the protagonist, a boy who is in search of his lost shadow. It underlines the theme of the quest for one’s inhibited self through the allusions it makes to both Olive and Tom’s life at Todefright. The tales Olive creates both during her childhood and when she is a married woman show that this quest involves the gothic motif of the underworld, which symbolizes the desire to escape a confining existence. *Tom Underground* is set in a nursery turning into a dark cavern of shadows in the protagonist’s imagination, where a black rat steals his shadow. The theft of the shadow by a threatening creature represents the undesired loss of self and reflects the woman writer’s suppressed fear of being subjected to a selfless existence. Tom, who can escape the house for the woods, can be read as Olive’s alter ego actualizing her hidden desires. Lancelin’s loss of his shadow as well as his escape to and death in the woods, caused by his inability to find a place for himself in a stifling world, reflects Olive’s imprisoned existence at Todefright, which inhibits the woman writer and the New Woman in her. His final death also suggests Olive’s inability to forge for herself a new identity and place in a changing world.

Tom Underground is a story that underlines the theme of the inhibited potential of female creativity. As a product of a painful writing process during which the writer tries hard to reconcile her roles – the role of mother and wife – and her identity as a writer, it has several significant allusions to the obstacles to female creativity. The tale is one of those “secret tales” she writes for her children in addition to those she writes to meet the expenses at Todefright. On the one hand her writing both gives her a sense of financial power and also supports her

⁶³Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead. A Writer on Writing*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 35.

psychologically as it is only during writing that she feels she really belongs to Todefricht. On the other hand, it reflects – as it is seen in *Tom Underground* – her acquiescence of female subordination. The male protagonist of the story Lancelin, as Olive decides to name him, and thus can be read as Olive’s double. He is left without a shadow, which comes to signify that he has lost his self. In the case of the woman writer, the loss of the self signifies the impossibility of ascertaining her identity as a writer in the male canon.

Daughter of a poor miner, Olive, indulging in wishful thinking, endows her protagonist with a king and queen as parents. The nursery which turns into a cavern of shadows in the protagonist’s imagination is the main place he is seen in the tale. Lancelin is portrayed as quite happy there, smiling all the time, playing games all by himself, and creating shapes with his hands, which reveals his artistic disposition, or actually Olive’s identity as a woman writer at home in the underworld, a female place of introspection which moreover feeds the writer with an ancient treasure in the form of the knowledge and stories of the past. The cave of the shadows can indeed be associated with Sbyllis’s cave, which also suggests the woman writer’s willing and imposed isolation from the patriarchal society. The rattle in Lancelin’s hand accentuates the association of the (female) writer with the pen, the gothic tradition, and art. The rattle is the main medium of his artistic expression with which he, with the help of the light spread by the moon referred to as “she” in the story, creates shapes on the wall, the bells attached to it also producing music. It thus first of all functions as a surrogate of the writer’s pen. While the rattle’s “mother-of-pearl handle”⁶⁴ makes it also an art object, its appearance “in the form of a horned and bearded godling”⁶⁵ accentuates the gothic nature of Lancelin and Olive’s art. A gift of both his mother and father, the rattle carries both feminine and masculine characteristics: the mother-of-pearl on the one and the horned and bearded godling on the other hand. This comes to mean the mutual existence of both the female and male tradition in the woman writer’s mind, the latter making her vulnerable to its

⁶⁴A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 143.

⁶⁵Ibid.

effects and leaving her anxious as a writer. This picture of artistic creation is indeed disrupted.

The baby is on the one hand a peaceful one that can entertain himself even at night, on the other hand he faces the threat of losing “something”, his shadow, as prophesied by the “malign fairy”.⁶⁶ The thieving rat stands, among others, for Aunt Ada in Olive’s life. She obviously lost something from herself when her aunt ‘stole’ her right to education not sending her to school. She was expected to lead her life as a servant, a fate imposed on the daughters of poor families in a patriarchal culture. The name Lancelin, a derivative of the more commonly known name Lancelot, means servant in French. The rat then also stands for patriarchal culture, and more specifically the male literary tradition, which underprivileges women, imprisoning them in the roles of wife, mother, and muse respectively, which are not unlike the role of a servant.

Lancelin’s nursery is not necessarily a happy place per se; it is only through the guidance of his imagination that the nursery becomes a place that fosters his creativity. If he were not able to transform the nursery into an inspirational place in his imagination, it would remain as a dark and dull place that would not provide any joy. Indeed, Todefright for Olive is such a stifling place that writing becomes a way out:

“When Olive was disturbed, she wrote. She wrote as she might dream, finding the meaning, or abandoning the images, later. She wrote to get back into that other, better world.”⁶⁷

In her imagination, she converts this prison like house into a disintegrating place, a sign of gothic description, thus opening up space for her pent-up artistic potential. Like Lancelin, it is only through the work of the imagination that she can liberate herself as a writer. She creates a world of fantasy and the gothic stories she

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 224.

writes help her picture herself as a creative artist in a house that is gradually converted into a liberating site.

As a household, Todefright imposes on her certain domestic roles that impede her artistic potential. Thus, Olive needs to transform this house into a place of art. Indeed, she even presents the house as a collapsing site that would eventually free her altogether from patriarchal constraints. The following quotation shows the convergence of the house, more particularly the study, into a house of art:

“She took pleasure, too, in the inert solidity of glass panes and polished furniture and rows of ordered books around her, and the magic trees of life woven in glowing colours on the rugs at her feet. She never got used to owning these things, never saw them simply as household stuff. They were still less real than the ashpits of Goldthorpe. They still had the quality Aladdin's palace must have had for him and the princess, when the genie erected it out of nothing.”⁶⁸

She takes pleasure from her creative potential that makes her see the objects in the house as works of art rather than the ordinary flow of life at Todefright. On the one hand, the ordered books in the study and Aladdin, the protagonist of many stories in *1001 Nights*, are direct references to fiction. The colourful patterns of the rug, on the other hand, turn into a magic tree that fosters her writing and the glass panes symbolize the reflective nature of art. However, this way of picturing the house as a site of art does not totally free her and as a result, she decides to collapse it altogether. Olive's description of her house is not different from the gothic descriptions of a disintegrating world in *Tom Underground*:

"She imagined her home standing on terrifying strata of underground rocks and ores [. . .] - liquid silver and gold - she always imagined them liquid, like quicksilver though she knew they were not."⁶⁹

The desire to prove herself as an unbound woman leads to the destruction of the house in her writing, which is suggestive of the destructive potential of the gothic.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 141.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 142.

Olive writes in *Tom Underground* that the baby prince “had a pleasant disposition, though he could easily have been spoiled”.⁷⁰ What might spoil “the pleasant disposition” of the female writer is her affinity with the dark gothic, in which women frustrated by the impossibility of ultimate self-emancipation turn into malign witches bringing destruction to others. In the story, the reader does not see the baby grow up since the story is left incomplete, which is suggestive of Olive’s fear that she cannot fully actualize herself as a woman/writer. When the baby’s shadow is stolen, he is rendered as vulnerable and likened to “Sleeping Beauty”, which points at the dormant potential to create, which is never fully realized. In compensation for the lost self, Olive actually thinks a helper is necessary and contemplates the idea of introducing “a magic snake” since “snakes ate rats”.⁷¹ What she visualizes as a snake is obviously female creativity. In Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Eve is portrayed as a transgressive woman endowed with imagination which helps her attempt to rewrite the story written by God for Adam and her. Once she finds a solution to the stolen shadow or the lost creativity, however, she stops writing as she cannot think how to continue the tale. The snake is not introduced into her story and her creativity is thus not fully liberated.

This impossibility of actualizing herself fully as a woman/writer leads her to take on the role of a destructive witch, writing “a tale of witchcraft”,⁷² among them *Tom Underground*, which not only shows her desire to demolish her prison-like home but also leads her son Tom, the male heir, into death. The introvert Tom frees himself from the life at Todefright by escaping to nature and spending most of his time there. However, Olive makes his private realm public by portraying her son as the protagonist of her story and allowing it to be put on stage. He is left with no way out and commits suicide. Olive’s affinity with the gothic does not enable her to forge for herself a new life in a changing society, moreover, it proves destructive for her son, as reminiscent of another witch Medea, who avenged her unfaithful husband by killing her sons.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 143.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 145.

⁷²Ibid., p. 13.

It is ironic that the child she has reborn in the tale is driven by her in real life into a state of madness, in which he escapes from the people and civilization to isolated nature crying loud and eventually into death, which shows that Olive's creative power as a writer at the same time serves a destructive sort of motherhood. It is even more significant that the madness Tom experiences can also be observed in Olive herself towards the end of the narrative. She is left without any words and only cries after Tom's death. After this story, she writes none other, which shows that she no longer believes in her power to rewrite her story in a changing society.

3.3.3. *Tom Underground* and *The Shadow*

In his book *Reading the Child in Children's Literature*⁷³, David Rudd suggests reading *Tom Underground* together with the story *The Shadow* written by Hans Christian Andersen, whose stories made Olive afraid during her childhood. Andersen's story is also about a lost shadow and it tells the intellectual awakening of a European man through the encounter of his shadow with a woman called Poesy. The three main characters in Andersen's tale – the shadow, the European man, and Poesy – all have allusions to Olive as a woman/writer.

The characterization in Andersen's tale bears several similarities to Olive as both a female protagonist and a writer of her own tales. The shadow in Andersen's tale is lost one night while the European man is sitting on the balcony of the hotel he stays and returns years later as a real man. During the time he does not serve the European man, the shadow walks around different corners of the world and learns a great deal about the world and the intrinsic nature of man. The European man warns the shadow that he does not "belong to the common order"⁷⁴, thus unable to understand the world as it is; however, the tale reveals towards the end that it is the man, not his shadow, who is quite unaware of the world. The European man is not so much different from Olive in that both gradually realize that they have not

⁷³David Rudd, **Reading the Child in Children's Literature: An Heretical Approach**, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

⁷⁴Hans Christian Andersen, "The Shadow", (Online)
http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheShadow_e.html, 31 July 2016.

internalized the life they lead or reconciled with the identity they have. In addition to the characterization, the dark ending of Andersen's tale also presents a parallelism to the end of Byatt's story of the Wellwood family. The man in *The Shadow* dies when he is faced with the dark hidden aspect of the world he supposes that he knows very well. Similarly, Tom is found dead and his death marks the end of both *Tom Underground* and *The Children's Book* as well as signifying Olive's metaphorical death as a writer.

Olive's interest in dark tales with frightening or unhappy endings, which is reflected in the descriptions of the underworld in *Tom Underground* and bears similarities to the tale of Andersen, also highlights the rejection of conventional fairy tale narration that relies on happy endings and closure. The insistence in happy endings is a reflection of the subconscious nostalgia for a better world. David Rudd argues about the end of *The Children's Book* that "it is this infatuation with a more desirable world that makes the Age of Lead - of the First World War - the more shocking in the book's devastating, telegraphic finale, mocking the tidy closures of Victorian novels".⁷⁵ *The Children's Book* uncovers the many contrasts persistent in its characters' lives and, in this way, narrates its characters' coming to an awareness of the world they live in. Olive cannot reconcile the reality she has at Todefright with the magical world of the fairy tales and starts to write dark, frightening tales with gothic elements. For Tom or the man in *The Shadow*, both of whom can be read as reincarnations of Olive, this confrontation is much more devastating and ends up in death.

The gothic atmosphere of Andersen's tale and the subtle allusions it has to female creativity draw attention to its parallelism with *Tom Underground*. The imagery of the moon referred as "she" in *Tom Underground* is similar to the woman called Poesy in Andersen's tale in that both give light to those around them and make them aware of their identities. In Olive's tale, the moon lightens Lancelin's room and enables him to use his hands artistically to form shapes on the wall. In Andersen's

⁷⁵David Rudd, **Reading the Child in Children's Literature: An Heretical Approach**, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 180.

tale, the man is attracted to the beauty of the woman living across the street and sends his shadow to her house to learn who she is and where she comes from. The woman who is called Poesy is portrayed as a woman possessing the eternal knowledge about the world and the man. Once the shadow is sent to her house, he returns completely changed, unwilling to obey the man, and acting like a free man now. He claims: "I was there for three weeks, and that has as much effect as if one had lived three thousand years, and read all that was composed and written; that is what I say, and it is right. I have seen everything and I know everything". Andersen's tale can be read as a story of gaining knowledge of the world through the encounter with a woman who, like a timeless poesy, presents man a new way of looking at reality. Both *Tom Underground* and *The Shadow* present women as characters connected with art, creativity, and an unbound imagination and presenting, for the protagonists, a new way of looking at life.

The learned man, Tom, and Olive are all protagonists of their own tales at the end of which they find themselves imprisoned in the world they suppose they are familiar with. Olive reconsiders her life at Todefright and the roles she has there as mother and wife with the help of her writing which enables her to take a self-criticizing stance. This sort of self evaluation leads to a feeling of discomfort, which is seen in Andersen's tale as well. The learned man writing mostly about the true, the good, and the beautiful realizes that no one cares and reads such things. It is the woman and what her imagination creates that makes man come to new realizations about himself. Female creativity is represented by Olive's writing in *The Children's Book*, the moon in *Tom Underground*, and Poesy in *The Shadow*. Poesy makes the learned man realize that he is imprisoned amidst the reality he has hold as true. Writing *Tom Underground*, Olive becomes aware of her imprisonment at Todefright and delves into the world of the gothic. Tom is imprisoned in the tale his mother writes for him as the tale pulls him more into the Todefright reality he wants to escape and he is freed in the tale as Lancelin, a boy revealing his artistic predisposition in moonlight.

Apart from the learned man in Andersen's tale, one other character who is not different from Olive is the shadow. The act of writing dark stories opens, for the woman writer, the world of the gothic which is a medium through which she defies the reality she has at Todefright. However, it proves destructive both for her and for her son Tom as it defines the boundaries of his world, leaving him no place to act on his own and intensifies the feeling of being sunken in the stories she writes. Just as the shadow in Andersen's tale adopts a commanding attitude towards his former master and starts to direct his life, the story Olive writes for Tom already - and even too early- defines the reality Tom tries to comprehend himself. The shadow of the learned man realizes that he can go out alone and declares that "I went my own way". Similarly Olive realizes her liberation through writing and feels autonomous as she constructs her characters. This artistic disposition of both Olive and the shadow results in death at the end of their tales. The learned man is imprisoned and killed as the shadow reconstructs him as the shadow and himself as a real man in his imagination and makes those around believe so. What Olive does in *Tom Underground* is not different at all since she leads Tom into death by portraying him passively controlled by the Shadow Queen.

Like many of her tales, *Tom Underground*, bears many potentials in itself as it does not have a closure yet. The lack of an end signals Olive's ever present authority as the writer of the stories that shape the lives of her children. These endless stories are "like segmented worms, with hooks and eyes to fit onto the next moving and coiling section"⁷⁶ and everybody in the house knows that "spider webs could become fetters as strong as steel"⁷⁷ and imprison them. Olive singles out Tom as her favourite child as, among all her children, he resembles her most in his preference to escape into the imaginary as a reaction to the incomprehensibility of his own reality. Unable to fit in the reality of Todefright, Tom, like his mother, hides himself in the imaginary world of the world under the earth. The dark world of the boy with a lost shadow that Olive constructs in the tale on the one hand becomes the very shelter he constructs his own reality in. On the other hand, the very world turns

⁷⁶A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p.81.

⁷⁷Ibid.

into a place that captivates his soul and leaves him incomplete like the shadowless man in Andersen's tale. "Underneath the earth, in an imaginary realm of rock tunnels and winding stairs, the shadowless seeker, with the trusted Company, never growing older, never changing their intent, travelled on towards the dark queen weaving her webs, and snares, and shrouds".⁷⁸ Trying to construct his own world of fantasy, Tom gets imprisoned in the world of her mother's, who is likened to "a dark queen" now, and subsequently fails to exist there.

3.3.4. *Tom Underground* as a play:

In response to the director August Steyning's request that she write a tale for him, Olive decides to base it on *Tom Underground*. It presents us with the reconciliation between Tom played by an actress and the Queen of Shadows in the underworld, a place of both fear and inspiration for the writer. Like *Tom Underground*, it can be said that they play adaptation shows Olive's search for her own shadow, which is the writer and the New Woman in her. As an experimental realm giving players and playwrights the chance to embark on another identity and resist the common order, the theatre stage has provided women (and men) the chance to resist the conventional identity defined for them by society. The Fabians and the Suffragettes, as noted above, tried to establish a new social order by deconstructing the long held assumptions regarding gender roles. Olive too tries to redefine her identity and accepts Steyning's offer to stage her tale seeing the theatre as an opportunity to exhibit and prove herself as a woman/writer. The play is a chance for Olive to see her words turn into solid entities. Her words on the page now need "wings and flats, costumes and shoes, lighting and trap-doors and flying machines and wind machines and hiding-places for those who pulled the strings".⁷⁹ For Olive, the prospect of staging her tale at Elysium Theatre appears to be a liberating act, however, unlike when writing, it results in her being guided by August Steyning and her tale rewritten by him.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 235.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 518.

Olive's quest for self empowerment is closely interwoven with the history of theatre in which women were not initially given the right to have careers as actresses and playwrights. The exclusion of women from the stage, and thus the public realm, resulted in male actors acting in the role of women on stage. As Gill Perry observes, "before the Restoration the nation's theatre was famously transvestite, with men and boys playing female parts".⁸⁰ However, "increasing numbers of women playwrights were active during the eighteenth century, contributing to a developing repertoire of plays and performances that sometimes featured spectacular female roles".⁸¹ Although also labeled prostitutes for their self exhibition on the stage, many of these actresses rose to the statue of "goddesses", "tragic and comic heroines" [...] "agents of transgression".⁸² Some like Nell Gwyn indeed gained not only riches but also political and social power by becoming, in her case, the mistress of King Charles II.⁸³ Olive's role as a playwright who is, however, controlled by a male and her preference for a male protagonist that personifies herself in her tale, who is in accordance with Steyning's wish played by an actress must be viewed within the context of the early history of the theatre as outlined above.

Olive's role as female playwright and affinity with the actress, established by the fact that Tom reflects her own inner world and is indeed played by a female, shows her desire to render herself visible to the world. Like some among them, she not only makes a small fortune but also wishes to be empowered like Gwyn. However, her choice of a male protagonist is reminiscent of early transvestism in the theatre before the Restoration, when men played women. Ironically, it is a male that reverses this transvestism when he decides that Tom should be played by a female. The day she goes to the auditorium to watch the auditions for the characters in the play, Olive realizes Steyning's preference for a woman to act as Tom, which reinforces the above made assumption that, despite the male protagonist, her tale is actually about herself.

⁸⁰Gill Perry, **The First Actresses: From Nell Gwyn to Sarah Siddons**, London, National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2011, p. 11.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 12.

⁸²Ibid., p. 13.

⁸³Ibid., p. 66.

Olive's story is, then, put on stage by a male director, Steyning, leaving no right to the woman writer to make any further changes or comments on the written text. Olive thinks that "writing stories, writing books, is fiercely solitary"⁸⁴ and it is this sense of being by herself in the act of creation that gives the woman writer a sense of freedom. She indeed argues that "she had lived with these shadows in that solitude, and had loved and hated and watched them do as they did, unconstrained".⁸⁵ That Olive contends that her tale be put on stage by him is the outcome of the need to be approved for her works by others, in particular by males. She cannot resist Steyning's choice of actors, costume, or dance elements in the play because she "needed to please Steyning".⁸⁶ The dream that Olive has the night before the play has symbolic connotations to the suffocating sense of imprisonment in a patriarchal society, in which men have control over women and their literary productions and the dark gothic as a means of attempting to resist this control:

"Olive dreamed that a theatre was a skull. She saw it loom in a foggy, sooty street, pristine white and smiling. There was nothing surprising in this shape. She floated in, somehow, between the teeth, and was in a dome full of bright flying things, birds and trapeze artists, angels and demons, fairies and buzzing insects. She was supposed to do something. Sort them, catch them, conduct them. They clustered round her head like the playing-cards in *Alice*, like a swarm of bees or wasps. She couldn't see or breathe, and woke up."⁸⁷

The analogy between the theatre and the skull, a most gothic staple, points at her fear of dying without leaving behind a supposedly immortal work of art to defy it. The flying birds, fairies, angels, and demons are nothing but the work of her imagination. But when she is left without breath and wakes up, she returns to the real world in which her imagination is left dormant. Here in the real world, she is deprived by Steyning of the right over her tale, which suggests that her imagination will no longer have a role in the creation of the play.

⁸⁴A.S. Byatt, *The Children's Book*, London, Vintage Books, 2010, p. 518.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 518.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 519.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 515.

As a tale, *Tom Underground* does not have an end since Olive prefers not to bring it to a closure. She desires to have the chance to rewrite her tale using multiple endings. On the other hand, she also fails to define her place as a woman/writer in the literary and the social world, which impedes her attempts to construct an end to her tale, which is to some extent her life narrative. The play designed by August Steyning, however, has an end written by Steyning himself. He wants Olive to write a female protagonist as they “do need a female lead”⁸⁸, who shall accompany Tom in his journey to the underworld. Olive chooses to include a sylph, “one of the Paracelsian four elementals”⁸⁹ and decides to portray her as a spirit who fears going underground and feels free in the air, which shows that the spirit, who too represents the writer, knows that it is a necessity to descend to the underworld, which represents a source of inspiration, but to remain there would mean death or isolation from society. However, the only alternative for Olive is that the sylph rise to the skies rather than find a place for her in society. The world above is another source of inspiration for the writer in literature, but remaining underground or above for good prevents the writer from defining a place for herself in society. Steyning wants Olive to make the sylph faint in the dark underground, which is suggestive of his undermining of the female potential to create. He also refuses to let the shadow of the male protagonist free and wants it to be “under the spell of the Shadow Queen”.⁹⁰ A Romantic, Steyning appears to prefer the gothic world to the real world as the site of his play. In this gothic realm, the shadow cannot act freely, but is under the control of the Queen Shadow, both standing for the writer Olive, who is thus doomed to remain in the gothic world in her desire for liberty, which however means a sort of death. The Shadow Queen’s imprisonment of the shadow and the sylph’s fainting show that Steyning interprets women as either evil witch-like creatures or as passive beings. Steyning thus exerts his control over Olive, the playwright who, despite her rebellion, in the end submits to patriarchal society. In fact, towards the end of the

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 516.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 517.

novel, she says “there would be no more stories”.⁹¹ However, she is uncertain whether “this too was a story”, that is a lie, “or a full stop”.⁹²

At the end of the novel, World War I breaks out and the vision of a utopian society dreamed by both the Fabians and the Suffragettes seems to fade away. But, after the war, in 1918, women above the age of thirty acquired the right to vote. At the end of the novel Olive appears quite passive lying in her bedroom with curtains closed, yet her story does not seem to come to a conclusion. In fact, she revisits certain characters she created in her mind, which suggests that her imagination is still active. It can be said that she has achieved, through the transgressive gothic, to liberate herself from the domestic roles she is supposed to play as a Mother Goose. Still, she seems to have failed to actualize herself in society, remaining captive in her imagination.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 536.

⁹²Ibid.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

A.S.Byatt's three intertextual works, *Possession*, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, and *The Children's Book*, underline reading and writing as two acts that guide the woman/writer's quest for female identity. Fairy tales, stories, poems, and myths are integrated in the main narrative as intertexts that the woman/writer reads in order to rewrite them in her mind and constitute her self-making narratives. Reading texts written by their female ancestors links women readers and writers to the female tradition and, together with their reading texts by men, makes them realize the gender politics existent in these narratives and society. How they read these texts and rewrite them in their narratives reflects their perception of themselves as women/writers in a culture that has long been under the influence of patriarchal values.

Byatt portrays her female protagonists as ardent readers/writers, who first decipher the gendered codes in narratives of the past and present, and subsequently in their lives, and then revise and thus redefine female identity. Each of the three works includes intertexts (from different genres), thus pinpointing the mutual relation between reading and writing.

Chris Walsh reads *Possession* as "a novel pre-eminently about reading and the intertextual and indeterminate nature of the process [...] in a double sense" arguing that "not only does the reader encounter various texts, but some of these are themselves readings, or 'stories of readings'"¹. In *Possession*, Maud Bailey reads the texts written by her ancestor Christabel LaMotte as well as the Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash. As a novel on the construction of female identity through reading and rewriting, *Possession* revolves around Maud's reception of the texts LaMotte wrote and how their view of life and themselves changes throughout the narrative. LaMotte's poems, letters, and tales uncover how she defined herself as a

¹ Chris Walsh, "Postmodernist Reflections: A.S. Byatt's *Possession*", **Theme Parks, Rainforests, and Sprouting Wastelands: European Essays on Theory and Performance in Contemporary British Fiction**, Vol. 123, Ed. by Richard Todd & Luisa Flora, Rodopi, 2000, p. 185.

woman/writer in Victorian England and makes Maud rethink her position in a patriarchal culture. Indeed, Maud's reading the texts written by LaMotte enables her to hear her own voice within the lines as it is the language of a timeless 'woman writer'. It expresses the desire of the woman/writer to belong to a literary tradition so as not to feel thwarted among her male counterparts.

Reading and writing in the presence of other women writers increase Maud's tendency to question herself, thereby evaluating her identity as a woman in line with that of another woman. The woman writer who is at the same time the 'mother' of the female literary tradition provides a secure ground for the self-expression of her female descendants. Byatt's two female protagonists in the novel are, as mentioned above, portrayed within the context of a literary mother-daughter relationship. As a writer, LaMotte is a reader of the literature written before her and, with her own texts, she is now one of Maud's literary forebears. Maud's dependence on LaMotte both as a literary forebear and a substitute for a non-existent biological mother draws attention to the issue of maternity in literature. The search for surrogate mothers reflects the intrinsic need of women writers to find a link to the female past. This link is necessary for a sense of togetherness and to feel as part of a movement they can internalize. The desire to find one's forebears indicates a more general wish to create a feminist tradition that allows women to express themselves through words.

That reading and writing play an important role in the female character's life is the main theme explored in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* as well. In most of Byatt's books, tales and myths have a significant role in the narrative in that the narratives of the past emerge as the very thing that constitute the text in hand. In both the title story and the other stories, reading stands out as an act that drives the (female) readers to reevaluate their current subject positions. Byatt's reader is presented with rewritings of traditional fairy tales and myths just as Gillian Perholt – the female protagonist of the title story – rereads texts with a critical eye. Within the frame-story of *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, Gillian revisits old myths and fairy tales only to write her own story as a woman.

As a novella that rests on the idea of intertextuality, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* puts forward the idea that truth is a notion that is constantly rewritten. In her article called "Wonder Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in *The*

Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", Annegret Maack underlines Byatt's commitment to metafiction and the implications in her novels that metafiction is a means of reaching one's own truth. She states that we "understand our life not by attempting to record it realistically but through the mirror of imaginative tales"². In this respect, rewriting old tales is a constructive act that reshapes Gillian's perceptions of self and life. In an age when one's sense of a single reality or Truth is deconstructed, writing through intertextual links enables the writer and the reader to construct new realities. Byatt uses a narratologist as the main character of the novella and gives her the role of constituting her own narrative within a frame narrative. The title story is the frame within which Gillian reconstructs her reality through the act of storytelling. Byatt creates a fairy world to imply the magical aspect of this reconstruction process. Byatt's use of fairy tales is not a postmodern rejection of reality at all; rather it is an acknowledgement of its dynamic nature, just like that of language. Since narratives are no longer conclusive or linear, what they show us is only the cyclic nature of reality. Commenting on the significance of storytelling in the works of many writers in her article "Old Tales, New Forms", Byatt suggests that "stories within stories that show the relativity of time"³ imply that myths and fairy tales of the past also give us ideas about the reality, or women's, of the present.

The issue of rereading and rewriting and their function to help us comprehend a changing reality is further developed in the other stories of Byatt's novella. The stories are also retellings of famous fairy tales and myths. They function as intertexts questioning the stereotypes within themselves. Contrary to the prototypes found in fairy tales – the submissive wives/daughters, oppressive fathers/husbands – and the stock motifs that promise happy endings, Gillian's rereading of these tales gives voice to women. In Byatt's novella, rewriting is preceded by a critical reading of old tales. This intertextual involvement in old stories enables the narrators of new stories to question basic female stock figures and let the female narrator find her voice in literature.

² Annegret Maack, "Wonder-Tales Hiding a Truth: Retelling Tales in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*", *Essays on The Fiction of A.S. Byatt, Imagining the Real*, Ed. by Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble, London, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 131.

³ A. S. Byatt, "Old Tales, New Forms", *On Histories and Stories, Selected Essays*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p. 130.

Reading and writing are key factors behind the writing practices of the female protagonist in *The Children's Book*, as well. While reading is the underlying motive enriching the imagination of the subject, writing enables her to give voice to her worries and fears. *The Children's Book* dwells on the mutual relationship between reading and writing and how these two acts serve as a means of expression for the female character. *The Children's Book* approaches writing as an individualistic act and interrogates whether writing is a liberating act for the female protagonist. With the stories she produces, she not only shows the reader that she perceives the world as an insecure place, expressing her feeling of being stuck in such a place but also that the dark gothic world of the underground stands for a liberating realm for the woman writer. The tales she narrates uncover her feeling of imprisonment while guiding her into the world of the imagination and fantasy. Writing stories in *The Children's Book* functions as a means of free expression, in that writing about the underground serves as a means of escape from entrapment in patriarchal society.

The protagonist Olive frantically writes fairy tales particularly during those moments when she is unsure of the future, being shaped by the suffrage movement and Fabianism; during her pregnancy, which reinforces her ambivalent attitude toward motherhood; when she is worried about her present existence in Todefright, or remembers her unpleasant childhood which robbed her of the opportunity to educate herself. In this respect, she turns to writing as a way out of both her present and her past.

Just like the characters in her novels, Byatt proves herself as a subtle reader behind her books. In her interviews, she mostly emphasizes the close interaction between reading and writing, and states that she has read various genres, incorporating them into the narration. For her, the reading process is creating a "pastiche"⁴. Reading enables Byatt to feel connected to her forbears in a long literary tradition. As a writer whose main concern is storytelling as a liberating act, reading links her to those writers in literary history with the same concern. In this respect, her

⁴ Nancy A. Walker: **The Disobedient Writer: Woman and Narrative Tradition**, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995, p. 337.

novels show the complementary relationship between reading and writing or between tradition (literature) and individual (writer).

The intertextual aspect of *Possession*, *The Children's Book*, and *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* underlines the undeniable role narrating plays in people's lives while the reading and writing practices of Byatt's three protagonists point to their resolute desire to define themselves as women/writers. For Maud, Gillian, and Olive, reading initiates a process of realization followed by the attempts to produce their self-making narratives. The answer to the question how does writing help the female characters channel their emotions and thoughts about life also highlights the position of the reader and the intertwined nature of reading and writing.

The relation of reading to writing is defined as the relation of the past to the present. In "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", Adrienne Rich draws attention to the same issue of reading the literary past in order to write the present. She states that "[r]e-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival"⁵, in particular for women. In this respect, it can be argued that writing is an existential concern for the female characters in *Possession*, *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, and *The Children's Book*. In their quest for identity, reading the texts of the past provides them with links to the female tradition. For Gillian and Olive, this link with the past established through reading culminates in writing.

Byatt's female characters in *Possession*, *The Children's Book*, and *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* all depend on writing/narrating stories that give them a sense of the world and their roles in it. The physical world they live in becomes comprehensible during writing, narrating, or storytelling. Byatt argues in her article "The Greatest Story Ever Told" that "narration is as much part of human nature as breath and the circulation of the blood"⁶. Maud, Olive, and Gillian narrate stories that were already narrated in the past. In other words, their stories testify to a long

⁵ Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" *College English*, Vol. 34, No. 1, *Women, Writing and Teaching* (Oct.,1972), p. 18.

⁶ A. S. Byatt. "The Greatest Story Ever Told", **On Histories and Stories, Selected Essays**, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p. 166.

tradition of literature that keeps narrating the same stories in different forms and genres.



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Özgeçmiş

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları bölümünden 2007 yılında lisans ve 2010 yılında yüksek lisans dereceleriyle mezun oldu. Doç. Dr. Özlem Öğüt Yazıcıoğlu danışmanlığında “Return to Exile: *The Mimic Men*, *Surfacing* ve *Ignorance* Romanlarında Ulus ve Kimlik” isimli yüksek lisans tezinde üç romanda ev ve dönüş kavramları üzerinde durdu. 2014 yılında "Madness as Both a Motif and a Source of Writing in Jewish Literature" adlı makalesi *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies* adlı hakemli dergi tarafından yayımlandı. 2009 yılında Celal Bayar Üniversitesi'nde “James Joyce’un *Ulysses*’i ve Orhan Pamuk’un *Kar*’ı” isimli, Ege Üniversitesi'nde “Ataerkillik ve Kadınlık: Angela Carter’ın *Büyülü Oyuncakçı Dükkanı* ve Latife Tekin’in *Sevgili Arsız Ölüm*’ü” isimli bildiriler sundu. Kasım 2013’te Mimar Sinan Üniversitesi’nde düzenlenen *Fiction and Space* isimli konferansta Latife Tekin romanlarını şehir ve edebiyat konu başlığı altında inceleyeceği bir bildiri sundu. Prof. Dr. Esra Melikoğlu danışmanlığında tamamladığı doktora tezinde A.S. Byatt’ın üç romanında okuma ve yazma eylemleri üzerinden kadın kimliğinin oluşumunu inceledi. Çeşitli gazetelere ve dergilere katkı yazıları sunmaktadır. Şu an İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi’nde okutman olarak çalışmaktadır.

Curriculum Vitae

Yasemin Yılmaz received her BA in Western Languages and Literatures from Boğaziçi University in 2007 and her MA in 2010. In her thesis called “Return to Exile: Nation and Identity in *The Mimic Men*, *Surfacing*, and *Ignorance*” under the supervision of Assoc. Dr. Özlem Öğüt Yazıcıoğlu, she worked on the notions of home and return in three contemporary novels. She presented a paper called “James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow*” at Celal Bayar University and a paper called “Patriarchy and Womanhood in Magical Realist Novels: *The Magic Toyshop* by Angela Carter and *Dear Shameless Death* by Latife Tekin” at Ege University in 2009. In her PhD thesis under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Esra Melikoğlu, she studied the role of reading and writing in the formation of female identity in A.S. Byatt's three novels. She is currently an instructor at Istanbul Technical University.